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APRIL 1990

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THE NEXT DECADE

Views on the Video Future by

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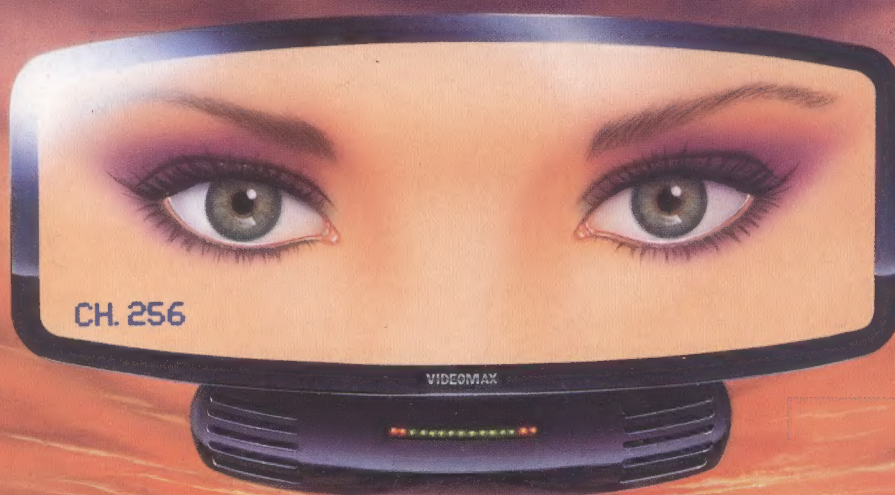
Jim Lehrer

Paula Abdul

Mike Tyson

& Others...

**Director
Martin
Scorsese
on the
Afterlife
of Movies**



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the Shape
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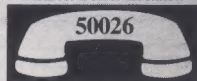
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V I E W P O I N T



What's Past Is Prologue

Welcome to our party. . . . This month, *Video Review* celebrates its 10th anniversary. We've been thumbing back through the last 120 issues, and wondering where the time has gone. It passes PDQ when you're having fun.

Besides chronicling home video's evolution, those 10 dozen issues frequently divined the course of video's future. This 10th Anniversary Issue sits on a similar cusp, gazing forward as it glances back.

Our Rewind installment recalls how in the beginning, "programming" was what you could record off the air, and about the only "prerecorded" available was X-rated. Today and tomorrow, attractively priced prerecorded cassettes will enable us to assemble home libraries of great movies. Our Editors' Choice suggests the 100 titles that should form the core of any collection.

Ten years ago, director Martin Scorsese could not have had much to say about video's role in preserving classic movies. But in this month's Anniversary Essay, the eminent filmmaker can elaborate—and also predict how video will influence the movies he makes in the future.

Speaking of the future, this collector's edition of *Video Review* polls leaders in the arts, entertainment, science and industry for their visions of video's impact and evolution over the next decade. Their thought-provoking forecasts make fascinating reading. Then just for fun, we've thumbed forward to our 20th Anniversary Issue for a special report on the electronics environments of April 2000. 'Til next time. . . .



STEPHEN A. BOOTH,
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Stephen A. Booth

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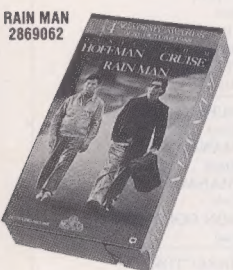
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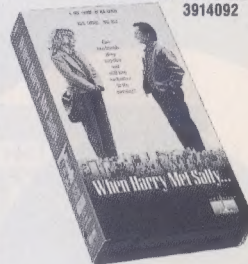
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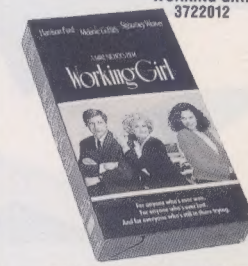
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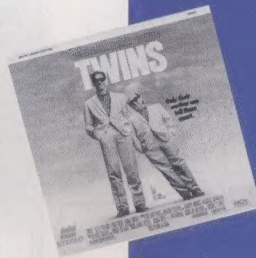
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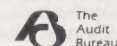
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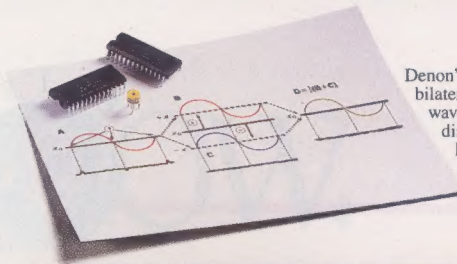
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Denon's consistent leadership in digital audio technology may explain why earlier generation

Denons often sound better than current competitors' models. And why a leading hi-fi journal found that a moderately-priced Denon equalled or outperformed all others tested, including machines costing over \$1800.

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DCD-1560 shown with the optional side panels available for most Denon models. Prices quoted are manufacturer's suggested retail prices and may vary.



Compare and Contrast

Thanks a lot. After nearly a year's vacillation between the largest available direct-view and rear-projection sets, I had just about settled on the Hitachi CU5000K so highly praised in your January '90 Test Report, when your February issue arrived.

At last, a "Big-Screen Face-Off" between the best of the rear-projection and direct-view sets. Guess what? The Hitachi CU5000K wasn't included, even though its lab measurements appear to be superior to the four rear-projection models tested.

Ah well, I guess I can wait another year. Perhaps there'll be a 40-inch direct-view set by then. Please tell the industry to quit spoon-feeding its technology and cut to the chase. I'm ready, willing and able, but \$4,000 is too much to spend for guaranteed obsolescence within five years.

Dave Stewart
Chicago, IL

I appreciated the special Test Report comparison on the rear-projection TVs. The findings of the judging panel confirmed my own eyesight test of the models included in the comparison. However, I was disappointed that the 52-inch Toshiba TP5288J was not among the sets tested. Please review this model in an upcoming issue to see how it stacks up against the others.

Robert Antognoli
Lincolnshire, IL

• *While we try to perform tests on a wide variety of products, we obviously can't review every set that appears on the market. Just because we didn't include the CU5000K in the comparison doesn't mean that our earlier report is invalidated; we stand by it and feel the set is a fine one. As for the TP5288J, we have no current plans to test it.* —Ed.

Reel Life

Your article on the history of the VCR left a gaping hole between 1927 and 1975—if that were all there was, then I wouldn't have been taping shows off the air in 1972. You forgot the pioneer effort on half-inch tape! The first videotape machine for us was the reel-to-reel half-inch machine. Mine still works fine.

Bob LeBar
Hartsdale, NY

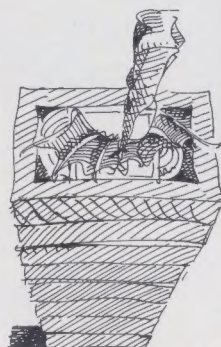
• *We didn't forget; the reel-to-reel decks are mentioned in the text of the article, but not in the timeline.* —Ed.

Shadows of Doubt

I read Jim Farber's review of *Dark Shadows* (Jan. '90 VR) with great satisfaction, thrilled that one of my all-time favorite television shows was bestowed with a three-star rating. Inasmuch as soap operas in general are still looked down upon by much of the public, it took a lot of guts for a reviewer to admit his enjoyment of this "soap opera that really wasn't."

MPI Home Video should be commended for attempting this project. However, it should be noted that while MPI is saying it will release the entire series (which Farber correctly points out would encompass over 1,200 episodes, or over 240 tapes), it should be noted that not all the episodes are being shown, and some of those that are, are being edited down.

I am not condemning MPI. It should be applauded for finally releasing a great television series on tape. The cuts that it does make are professionally done and anyone not aware of what the real show included would never realize that there are complete scenes and whole episodes miss-



ing. At the same time, it is disappointing, at least for this tape collector and *Dark Shadows* fan, knowing that I'm not getting the complete series as I had hoped.

Craig Pearce
Berwyn, IL

Boxed Set

Regarding Ed Dollak's objection to letterboxing because he likes his giant screen to be "totally filled with a picture" (Letters, Jan. '90 VR), presumably he would also be perfectly happy paying for a steak dinner even though his giant plate was totally filled with potatoes.

David Bantly
Alhambra, CA

Following Ed Dollak's kind of logic, I suggest he gather all of his family photos—especially the 8 by 10s—and trim them down with scissors so they will fit neatly into his wallet and totally fill the



plastic sleeves. Throw the trimmings with half of Junior's face and the sides of the Grand Canyon into the trash.

Only releasing movies in both formats will solve the problem. I buy tapes and laser discs *because* they are letterboxed.

Dan Miljanich
Westlake, OH

Bad-Tape Blues

Thank you for your informative article "Video's Dirty Secret" (Special Report, Jan. '90 VR) on low-cost prerecorded tapes.

Lured by the low price, I purchased a copy of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Not only was it recorded at the EP speed, but the entire sequence of James Stewart and Donna Reed walking along and breaking the windows in the old house had been deleted. You certainly only get what you pay for.

Kirk Matheson
Orem, UT

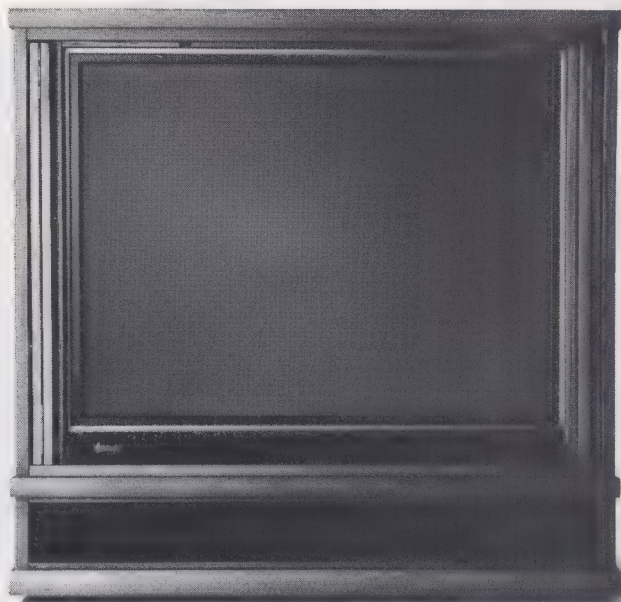
Great article on the cut-rate video market, but I'm still not sure. What did I expect for five or 10 bucks? Do I call this a bargain? I don't know! Your comparison table highlighted the dropout variances found in the budget tapes. Yet you failed to show any basis for measuring the acceptability of the other categories. JVC set the minimum standards. What are they?

Barry W. Parker
Monroe, LA

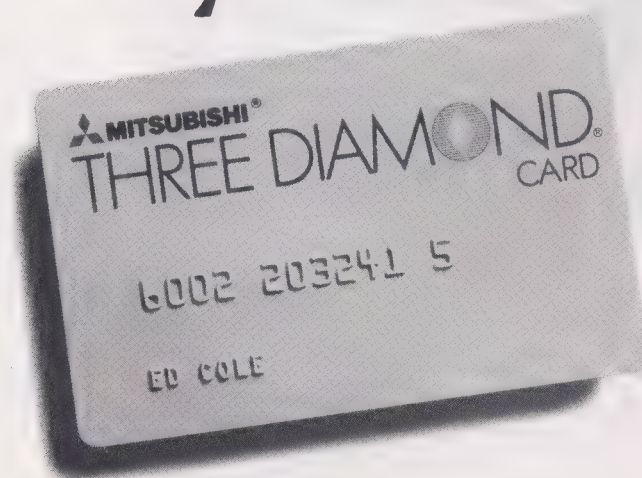
I found your article on low-cost prerecorded tapes very interesting. I have had the experience of purchasing bargain tapes that boasted outstanding tape quality—only to discover that the quality was less than outstanding, far less.

Incidentally, bargain tapes are not the only ones with this problem. Some cas-

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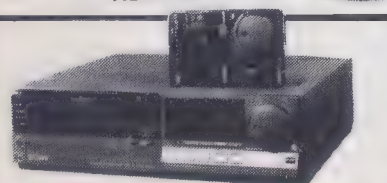
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10 VIDEO REVIEW

ettes put out by the major studios are also at fault. The last tape I bought by MCA, *Horse Feathers* with the Marx Brothers, was an edited print. If I wanted to watch an edited movie, I could watch broadcast television and save \$19.95.

Video had better clean up its act, because consumers are not as dumb as these video companies would like to believe. I, for one, have found the solution to the videocassette mess: laser discs!

L. Ferrara
Corona, NY

•According to an MCA spokesperson, the company's version is complete and unedited.
—Ed.

Hell to the Chief

Just when I was about to let my subscription to *Video Review* expire, along comes Paul Slansky's insightful article, "The Mistaking of the President" (Feb. '90 VR).

It was only a matter of time before ex-President "We Begin Bombing in Five Minutes" Reagan would get caught up in the Video Age.

Keep up the good and controversial work!

Robert Boyer
New Bedford, MA

Please advise us how to write to Paul Slansky. I'm sure many of us would like to have a chance to purchase some of his "presidential tapes."

Wallace S. Marsh
Lompoc, CA

Paul Slansky calls himself a video historian, but his videotaped "funny" moments of President Reagan just show the former President as human. Slansky writes of the First Lady feeding the President his lines, but Nancy often helped Reagan when he couldn't hear the questions. I just didn't realize that having a hearing ailment was so hilarious. Slansky then boasts of having watched some of these comical moments over 100 times! Too bad we didn't have television, VCRs, satellite feeds and 24-hour network news in the 1930s—then we would have had some really candid shots of FDR struggling in his wheelchair.

Chris Cottrill
Enon, OH

Say Uncle

Re Doug Brod's review of *Uncle Buck* (Feb. '90 VR): I agree very much with him that John Candy is getting better with each movie. However I think comparing John Candy's character to John Wayne Gacy is ludicrous. I'm sure that most of the fathers and uncles in America would consider that

the kid in the movie on whom Buck practiced "golfing justice" got off rather lightly. I would hate to think that Mr. Brod's crude analogy would keep people from seeing a very entertaining movie.

Craig B. McClellan
Ft. Madison, IA

Oz You Like It

I wanted to thank you for Jennifer Stern's beautiful piece about *The Wizard*



of *Oz* (Backspace, Jan. '90 VR) and the loss of special occasions. Indeed we are losing the sense of drama as something that people come together to do.

Richard Gerken
Massillon, OH

Delaware Awareness

Steven Gorelick, executive assistant at the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission, penned for your Letters section in the February 1990 issue a particularly stinging reprisal of Richard Schickel's panning of *See No Evil, Hear No Evil*, which was filmed in New Jersey. Mr. Gorelick stated, "It is my experience that people who disparage New Jersey in this manner have a) little originality, b) seen New Jersey only from the vantage point of the Turnpike and c) never been to Delaware." Considering his own logic and his statement about Delaware, I charge that Mr. Gorelick himself has perpetuated the same injustice for which he condemned Mr. Schickel.

Carol Myers
External Affairs Coordinator
Film Division
Delaware Development Office
Dover, DE

Selected correspondence addressed to Video Review, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010, is printed in the "Letters" section. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.

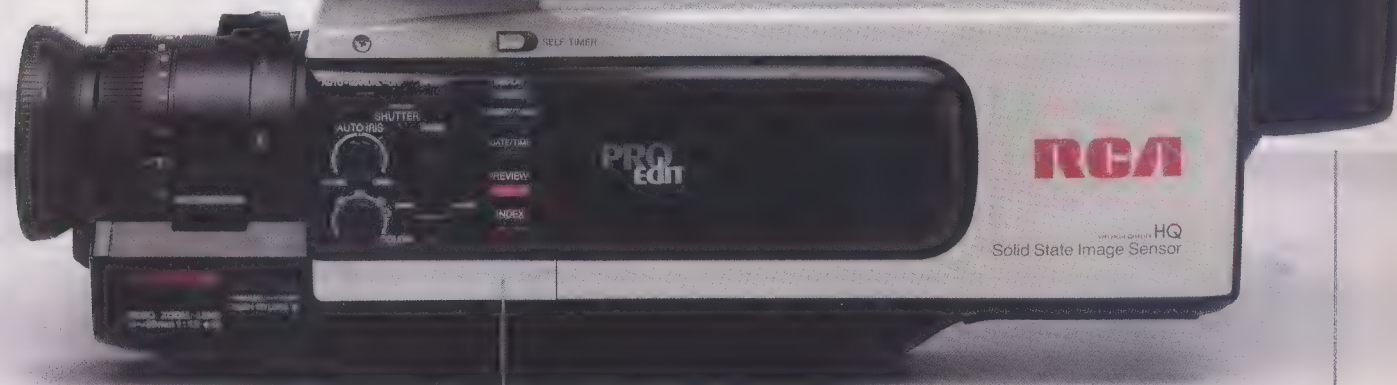
Electronic Viewfinder: doubles as a monitor for instant playback.

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Timothy Dalton

Can you tell me if *Wuthering Heights*, with Timothy Dalton, is available on videocassette?

V. Hogh
New York, NY

I have been looking for a movie I saw a few years ago on the A&E network. It was Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. This version starred Timothy Dalton (the new James Bond). It was a BBC production broadcast in five parts. I would like to know if it is available on videocassette, the price and where I can get it.

John Wilson
Martinsville, VA

Dalton, with his wavy dark hair, dimpled chin and dashing accent, is (it would seem) perfect for bringing the heroes of the Bronte sisters' novels to life. The BBC production of *Jane Eyre*, with Dalton as Rochester, is available in a two-cassette set, on VHS or Beta, for \$54.98 from CBS/Fox Video. *Wuthering Heights* (1970), based on the novel by Emily Bronte and starring Dalton as Heathcliff, is from HBO Home Video for \$19.99. If you can't order both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* through your local video retailer, they're also available from Facets Multimedia, 1517 Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614, (800) 331-6197. Facets carries several other versions of both movies, so make sure to be clear about the one you're looking for.

All the Marbles

For several years I have been looking for *Welcome to L.A.* and *In Praise of Older Women*. I have checked several stores and catalogs to no avail. I would also like to know if *All the Marbles* is still available on videocassette and, if so, where I might purchase it.

Joe Tavera
San Francisco, CA

Welcome to L.A. was originally distributed by CBS/Fox but has been withdrawn from distribution. *In Praise of Older Women*, the 1978 romantic drama, is also a CBS/Fox title and is distributed by Commtron on VHS or Beta for \$59.98. Call Commtron at (800) 432-7298 (CA only) or (713) 937-3600 to find a local retailer who will order it for you. *All the Marbles*, with Peter Falk as the manager of two lady



Wrestling women lose their Marbles.

wrestlers, is an MGM/UA Home Video release available on VHS or Beta for \$79.95. If you have trouble ordering through a dealer, call MGM/UA at (800) 443-5500. You might also check out your local Tower Video outlets at 3205 20th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94132, (415) 681-1311, or 2278 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94114, (415) 255-5920.

Blood and Sand

I am looking for a copy of the 1941 classic *Blood and Sand* on VHS.

J. Ketchedjian
Port Washington, NY

The 1941 version of *Blood and Sand*, with Tyrone Power as a bullfighter and Rita Hayworth as a woman who leads him from the path of virtue, has been put on moratorium by CBS/Fox Home Video, which means you may only be able to find it in older video stores. The original silent version from 1922, with Rudolph Valentino, is available, however. You can get it on VHS or Beta for \$29.95 from Video Yesteryear, Box C, Sandy Hook, CT 06482, (800) 243-0987.

Zabagabee & Tunnelvision

Could you tell me how to obtain a copy of *Zabagabee: The Best of Barnes & Barnes*, a collection of bizarre music videos from Rhino Video. Also, how about the 1976 movie *Tunnelvision*?

Leroy Starry
Fontana, CA

Zabagabee from Rhino Home Video is available on VHS only for \$19.95. You can order it directly from Rhino by calling (800) 432-0020, or write Rhino Home Video, 2225 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90404. *Tunnelvision*, the parody of network TV, featuring such not-yet-famous faces as Laraine Newman and Chevy Chase, is available on VHS or Beta from MPI Home Video for \$59.98. You can order it directly from MPI by calling (800) 323-0442, or sending \$59.98 plus \$3.95 shipping (check or money order only) to MPI Home Video, 15825 Rob Roy Dr., Oak Forest, IL 60452.

Koyaanisqatsi

I am wondering if the movie *Koyaanisqatsi* is on videotape? The last time I saw it was on public television.

Enrique Hernandez
San Antonio, TX

Koyaanisqatsi, the documentary about man and nature set to the music of Philip Glass, won the 1985 ViRA award for best documentary. It is distributed by Pacific Arts Video for \$19.95. You can order directly from Pacific Arts by calling (800) 538-5856, or send \$19.95 plus \$3.95 shipping (check or money order only) to Pacific Arts Video, 50 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90211.

The Party Animal

I am trying to locate a movie called *Party Animal*. I have been looking for the past three years, since my brother accidentally taped over my copy of it.

Coty Hutchinson
Kokomo, IN

The Hunter's trap has caught 1975's *The Party Animal*, about a teen who gets out of control once he's away from the folks and safely on a college campus. It's from Lightning Video (a division of Vestron) on VHS or Beta, for \$79.98. You can order it through Vestron's distributor Inovision, (800) 523-5503.

The Raven

I am looking for the movie, *The Raven*, with Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Vincent Price, Peter Lorre and Jack Nicholson.

Larry Brock
Las Vegas, NV

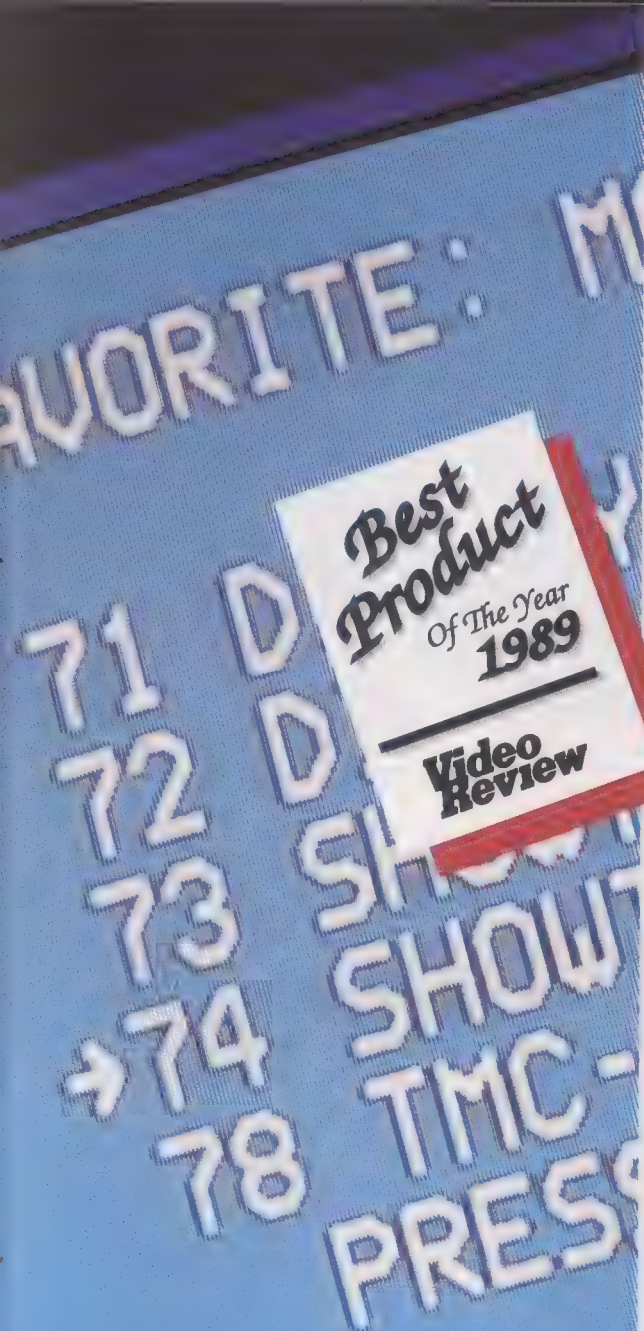
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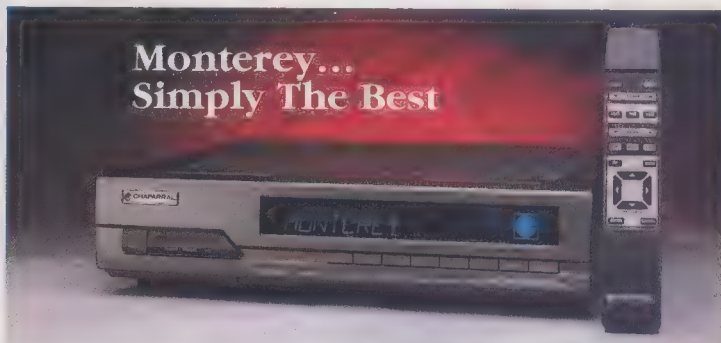
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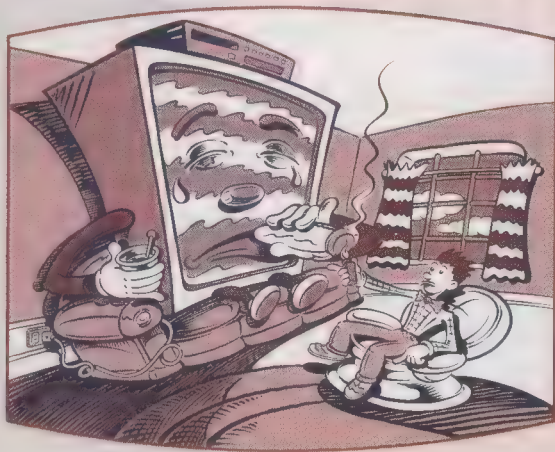
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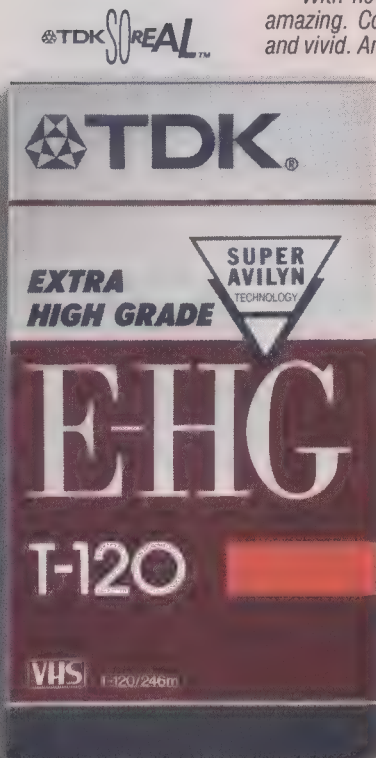
With new E-HG, picture sharpness (Luminence) is amazing. Colors (Chrominance) are refreshingly bright and vivid. And audio is crisp and natural. No matter what size screen you're watching these days, this is the tape you've been wishing "they" would come out with.

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Add all this and more to E-HG's high precision SQ cassette mechanism, and you've got a video tape that has the competition singin' the blues. Available in T-160, T-120 and TC-20 (VHS-C) lengths.

We also offer a complete line of video head cleaners.



There are two movies called *The Raven*—perhaps you have your birds mixed up. The version stars Karloff, Price, Lorre and Nicholson (and was directed by Roger Corman) but does not feature Lugosi, who died in 1956. It is no longer available from Warner Home Video, but you can rent it from Facets Multimedia in Chicago. Call Facets at (800) 331-6197 for rent-by-mail information.

1935's original *Raven* (directed by Lew Landers) did star Lugosi as a mad plastic surgeon (Karloff was his victim). It is available from MCA in a double-feature cassette package (with 1934's *The Black Cat*) for \$39.95 from MCA Home Video. Any problems finding it, write to Movies Unlimited, 6736 Castor Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19149, (800) 529-0823.

Transatlantic Tunnel

I am looking for *Transatlantic Tunnel* which starred Richard Dix and was made, I believe, in 1935. Can you help?

Harry Piesel

Charlotte, N. Carolina

Originally titled *The Tunnel*, this futuristic fantasy, about the construction of a tunnel under the Atlantic Ocean, is available from Video Yesteryear for \$29.95. To order a copy, write: Video Yesteryear, Box C, Sandy Hook, CT 06482, or call (800) 243-0987.

The North Star

I am trying to locate the movie *The North Star*, starring Anne Baxter and Farley Granger. They were all quite young in this black-and-white movie.

L. Jones

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Released in 1943, the controversial *The North Star* (scripted by playwright Lillian Hellman) depicts Russian villagers bravely fighting the Nazi advance into Russia. During the Cold War '50s, the movie was attacked by some as too "pro-Russian," and was cut by 20 minutes, re-edited and retitled *Armored Attack* for TV showings. The original version is available on VHS or Beta from Republic Home Video (#0156) for \$39.95. If you can't order it from your local retailer, try Tower Video's mail-order service: (800) 648-4844 or (212) 505-1166. Tower also accepts orders by fax: (212) 254-4644.

As a service to our readers, Video Review will help track down hard-to-find tapes or discs. Send requests to Video Review's Video Hunter, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.



Quick, which Samurai is an 8mm Camcorder?

At first glance, both Yashica Samurais above admittedly look like camcorders. But the Yashica Samurai X4.0 on the left is a Double 35mm SLR camera (it takes twice as many pictures per roll of film, up to 72). The Yashica Samurai Video 8 KX-1 on the right (in case you haven't already guessed, the 8mm camcorder) is the newest member of the Samurai family.

Both Samurais are part of a revolution that's giving picture-taking a sleek, more manageable new style. To wit, their vertical design, making one-handed operation remarkably easy.

And their weight. At just 1.75 lbs., you can take the new Samurai Video 8 anywhere the Samurai X4.0 can go. (We suggest taking them both on vacation).

But the new Samurai Video 8 stands on its own as a powerful, full-featured camcorder. For instance, it's got a 6X power zoom lens with macro.

A top shutter speed of 1/4000 and five

others: 1/60, 1/100, 1/250, 1/1000 and 1/2000.

For professional looking titles, it has reversible, scrollable, 8-color superimposition. As well as an additional low angle trigger for more creative shots. And for smooth transitions, a built-in audio-video fader and edit search. Add auto-focus, auto-exposure (to 4 lux) and backlight compensation, and you've got a small miracle that will get you big results.

Of course, the one thing the Samurai Video 8 can't do is make 72 perfect still photographs you can hold in your hand. But that's why there's a Samurai on the left.

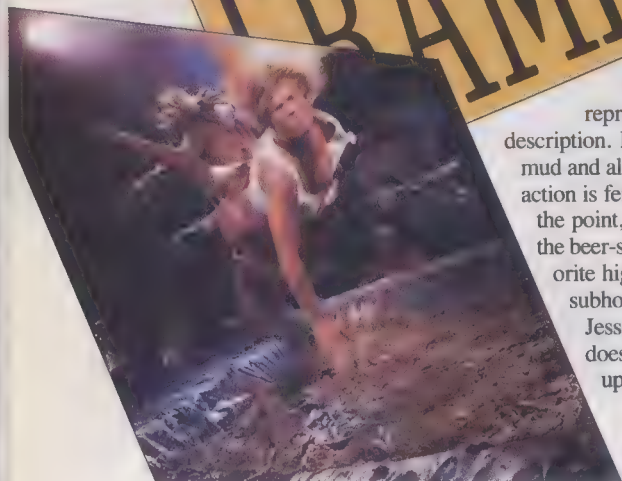
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FREEZE FRAMES



GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY

While synergy is a word most often used to justify, say, the leveraged buyout of a bubble gum company by a ball-bearing magnate, it's also handy when trying to describe certain cultural hybrids. Take *Thunder and Mud*, a recent RCA/Columbia release that, yes, synergizes female mud wrestling and heavy metal music.

While lensed by cult director Penelope Spheeris (*The Decline of Western Civilization, Parts I and II*), one shouldn't get the wrong idea—*Thunder and Mud* isn't a movie.

It's a videotaped record of a heavy metal/female mud wrestling event with a couple of dopey related "skits" thrown in.

The colorfully nicknamed wrestling women each represent a different band and, well, it's almost beyond description. Bo Peep takes on Sex Toy and soon, what with the mud and all, you can't tell the difference between the two. The action is feisty, the interplay vicious, and just in case you miss the point, Spheeris frequently cuts away to reaction shots of the beer-sotted, fat, male revelers enjoying the show. Our favorite highlight: the introduction of lousy band Tuff, where subhostess Leather Nun (the real hostess is the notorious Jessica Hahn) maintains, "these guys prove that glam doesn't mean gay." Glad to have that little point cleared up; now we know it really means "stupid."

QUOTE/UNQUOTE

"Japanese manufacturers . . . would love nothing more than to obsolete the VCR. And I can assure you the entertainment industry is cheering them on."

When Geoff Holmes, a Very Top Executive at Time Warner Inc., said this to a group of Sinister Financial Types last December, it confirmed our paranoid fear that we Little Guys are the victims of an International

Conspiracy. Yes, we're the Helpless Playthings of the Powers That Be—the Large Corporations that either make movies or manufacture the machines we watch them on. Holmes, a Senior Vice President of the World's Largest Media and

Entertainment Company, was blunt: He and other Hollywood Dealmakers would love to see your VHS VCR twist slowly in the wind. Then the Entertainment Conglomerates can go back and sell you all the same movies you've watched and rented on VHS—but this time, in a newer, Highly Profitable format like laser disc. This International Conspiracy to dump the VHS VCR into the trash heap of history was scheduled to start in the first quarter of this year, with joint promotions between Time Warner and several hardware manufacturers. And you thought that the last time you were an Insignificant Pawn was when you bought your Betamax!

Illustration: Robert Zimmerman



CRACKING UP

Judging from its cast, the Cannon Video release *Crankhouse* sounds like a lively low-budget laughfest. You'd expect any movie starring so many farmers—former General Hospital heart-throb Anthony Geary, former running back Jim Brown, former low-budget Vixen Angel Tompkins—to deliver the exploitation-flick goods, especially when that cast is headed up by Shoff himself—yes, Richard Roundtree. But wait—this isn't an exploitation throwaway—it's a *Movie With a Serious Message*. Or so Evan Fisher, vice president of Cannon, would have us believe. "*Crankhouse*," he boasts, "is a hard-hitting movie that pulls no punches in its depiction of the nightmare of crack abuse." (One could argue that the term "crack abuse" is practically a redundancy, since a socially responsible use for unobtainable cocaine has yet to be demonstrated. But never mind.) To bring the point home, star Roundtree has taped an anti-crack spot, featuring a play for the National Cocaine Abuse Hotline number, that'll be placed at the beginning of the cassette. This gets the chic-minded stuff out of the way, leaving the rest of *Crankhouse* to indulge in the usual B-movie mayhem with a clear conscience.

MAYBE HE STILL HAS NIGHTMARES ABOUT THAT LASER

We know that some actors claim not to relish the sight of themselves on screen. Still, we were surprised to find out the number of times Sean Connery



has watched the classic Bond flick *Goldfinger*. According to *European Travel and Leisure* magazine, Connery recently screened the MGM/UA Home Video version of the movie at his

granddaughter's request—and her first viewing was *his* second. He claimed to like it better this time, noting, however, that he has “many problems” with the Bond movies.

FIVE DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

A specter is haunting Soviet Russia—the specter of video. As *glasnost* and *perestroika* dissolve the Iron Curtain, the demand for Western values and, more importantly, consumer goods, continues. While in 1917 raging Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace, a more recent Russian siege was of a group of

department stores by rebels demanding VCRs.

The Associated Press reports that hundreds of angry shoppers in the Russian city of Yaroslavl conducted a five-day demonstration—complete with hunger strikes—demanding the chance to purchase imported VCRs. Apparently word had gotten out that

VCRs for workers who had earned foreign currency had been delivered to a particular Yaroslavl store. Comrades whose only tender is of the ruble variety were understandably miffed, and they surrounded the store and protested in the town square, demanding equal-opportunity purchasing power.

Finally store officials made some VCRs available to the general public. One happy shopper was heard to exclaim: “Victory! The Panasonic is in my hands!” We’re sure some enterprising Panasonic adman is drafting the drama into a 60-second spot right now. Too bad Eisenstein isn’t around to direct it.



What Are You Watching?

BEN E. KING

PAUL ANKA

GEORGE BENSON



Skulking around the Fifth Annual Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony, we asked every rock star we could find the Burning Question of the night: What are your favorite videocassettes?

Paul Anka, pubescent-rock-star-turned-Sinatra-knockoff (who was on hand to induct Bobby Darin, teen-rock-star-turned-Sinatra-knockoff), surprised us. “I love ‘directors’ films,” Anka said, “the works of the craftsmen like Fellini, Coppola and Scorsese—*La Dolce Vita*, *Raging Bull*, *The Godfather*.” You like anybody who’s not Italian, we asked? “Claude Chabrol.”

George Benson, obscure-jazz-guitarist-turned-rich-singer, was there to induct Charlie Christian, obscure-jazz-guitarist-turned-deceased-man. “My favorite stuff is science fiction,” Benson told us, “particularly the great old ones from the ‘50s.” Such as? “*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. As a matter of fact, I’m going to go home and watch it tonight.”

Finally we found Ben E. (“Stand by Me”) King, on hand to induct songwriters Gerry Goffin and Carole King. “I love *Moonwalker*,” King revealed. “I watch it with my kids—and their kids. I’m a grandfather, you know.”

HIT LIST

LAST MONTH	TOP TAPES	THIS MONTH	TOP DISCS	LAST MONTH
—	LETHAL WEAPON 2 Warner—\$24.98	1	WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT Touchstone CLV—\$29.99; CAV—\$39.99	1
1	INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE Paramount—\$24.95	2	BAMBI Walt Disney CLV—\$29.99; CAV—\$39.99	2
—	PARENTHOOD MCA—\$89.95	3	WHEN HARRY MET SALLY . . . Nelson LV—\$24.95	4
2	TURNER & HOOD Touchstone—\$89.95	4	THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK CBS/Fox LV—\$69.98	—
5	WHEN HARRY MET SALLY . . . Nelson—\$89.98	5	GONE WITH THE WIND MGM/UA LV—\$49.95	5
9	LICENCE TO KILL CBS/Fox—\$89.98	6	THE WIZARD OF OZ MGM/UA LV—\$24.98	6
—	KARATE KID III RCA/Columbia—\$89.95	7	WORKING GIRL CBS/Fox LV—\$39.98	—
10	UNCLE BUCK MCA—\$89.95	8	ROAD HOUSE MGM/UA LV—\$24.95	8
—	FRIDAY THE 13th PART VIII Paramount—\$89.95	9	RAIN MAN MGM/UA LV—\$29.95	—
3	BATMAN Warner—\$24.98	10	GHOSTBUSTERS II RCA/Columbia LV—\$24.95	3

"Hit List" is based on a nationwide survey of leading video software specialty stores, chains, mass merchandisers and wholesalers. The list includes titles taken from retailers' current top tape and disc lists as well as distributors' prerelease sales printouts.

Freeze That Frame

From our readers: a guide to the movies' most memorable goofs, gaffes and other "remote" secrets

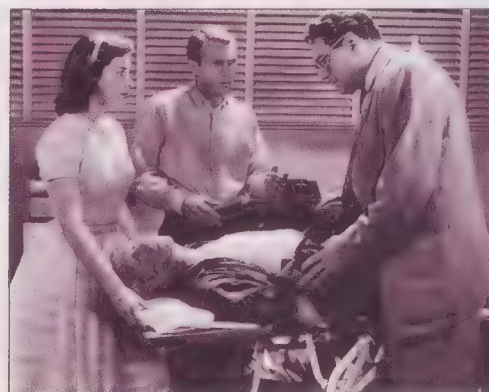


Amazing Grace: "A bloop-er involving reverse slow-motion can be found in *Carrie*," writes C.H. of Los Angeles. "Near the end of the film Amy Irving, in a dream sequence, is walking toward Carrie's grave. The film's director, Brian DePalma, apparently didn't like the look of the scene, so he had her walk backward and for the final cut reversed it. It comes off very ethereal and dreamlike. The scene is ruined, however, because if you look in the distance there is a car *also going backward*."

The Thumb Is Quicker Than the Eye: A subliminal message in *The Exorcist* revealed itself to the quick eyes (and thumbs) of VR readers John Weinberg of New York City and Gary Frisch of Fair Lawn, New Jersey. "There's a scene in which the priest, played by Jason Miller, emerges from a subway entrance. As he walks toward the

camera, a skull against a black background appears for one frame and then repeats several seconds later," writes Frisch. Weinberg and Frisch have different explanations for the fleeting skull, however. Writes Frisch, "It was probably meant to represent the duality of man, or to foreshadow Miller's death later in the movie." Very literary, but maybe Weinberg's answer is more to the point: "It was probably put there to give you the creeps (if you didn't have them already)."

Second Skull: Another skull meant to be noticed by the subconscious was revealed by the remote control of Fred Scudiero of Overland Park, Kansas. "At the end of *Psycho*," he writes, "Norman Bates [played by Anthony Perkins] is sitting in a padded room, contemplating his future. Next is a dissolve to Janet Leigh's car being pulled out of a pond behind the Bates Motel.



Where there's smoke: McQueen (center) encounters Blob victim.

The end. If you freeze-frame between the two scenes, you can distinctly see the face (skull) of Mother Bates, superimposed over the face of Norman. The decomposing face is hard to see when viewing at regular speed, so I recommend using a four-head deck or a laser disc."

A More Innocent Time: Apparently smoking was out of character for the young man played by Steve McQueen in *The Blob*. Linda Aldofi of

Queensburg, New York, noticed that McQueen may have been holding a lit cigarette out of the frame. "In a scene in which Steve McQueen is standing outside talking to his girlfriend," she writes, "behind him you can see smoke rising as if from a cigarette. A few seconds later, the camera angle changes and again you see rising smoke which seems to come from his hand. But, he is never shown smoking."

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NEWSBREAKS

HDTV AGREEMENT... DUAL-DECK VCR... MULTIFORMAT VHS... SATELLITE PROBE...

F.Y.I.

STATIONS SEEK SHOWS

TV STATION EXECUTIVES gathered in New Orleans in January for an annual programming convention. Among the shows hyped for premiering this fall were a talk show co-hosted by Ronald Reagan Jr., a cooking show starring Graham (Galloping Gourmet) Kerr and a game show exploiting the name of New York developer Donald Trump.

CNN GOES TO 'NAM

THE US GOVERNMENT HAS permitted Cable News Network to make the 24-hour news service available to Vietnam. CNN had filed a lawsuit challenging federal restrictions on selling the service in that country.

SONY SHRINKS DAT

SONY HAS DEVELOPED A compact digital audiotape recorder that uses a two-hour cassette the size of a postage stamp, the company says. At presstime, pricing and timing of the introduction of the recorder had not been determined.

CABLE TV GROWS

FIFTY-SIX PERCENT OF US households—52.6 million homes—subscribe to cable television, according to a Nielsen Media Research survey. Ten years ago, 19% of US households had cable, according to Nielsen.

CAPTION CHIP ON WAY

THE NATIONAL CAPTIONING Institute has commissioned ITT to develop a closed-caption decoding chip small enough to be built into television sets. Development of the chip is expected by the end of the year; NCI expects that the chip will start appearing in TV sets and VCRs by the end of 1992.

PIRATED TAPES TOTALLED

THE MOTION PICTURE Association of America said it worked with law enforcement agencies to seize 86,375 illegally copied videotapes in 1989. The MPAA admitted that this was only a small fraction of tape copies that were illegally sold or rented last year; tape piracy amounts to more than \$100 million at the wholesale level annually, according to the MPAA.

UNITED THEY STAND

Rival HDTV Makers Join Forces

By Robert Gerson

In what may be the critical move in bringing widescreen high-definition TV to US consumers, Philips Consumer Electronics has united with the scattered forces of the old RCA—Thomson Consumer Electronics, the NBC TV network and the David Sarnoff Research Labs—in an effort to develop a standard HDTV system.

The joint venture puts America's two largest TV set makers, the two biggest TV

research labs and the biggest network all behind the same HDTV system. And that should be a significant edge in the coming battle for adoption as the HDTV standard here.

The group proposes a two-stage introduction of HDTV to US consumers. Stage one would be a fully compatible, enhanced-definition TV system, based on the ACTV I (Advanced Compatible Television) system already demonstrated by Thomson, NBC and the Sarnoff Labs. Stage two would involve a true HDTV

signal simulcast along with a separate NTSC transmission. While the HDTV would not be compatible with current television, the system would meet the FCC's requirement that HDTV programming be simultaneously available to today's receivers.

Sarnoff and Philips are each dropping HDTV systems which were under development. Both envisioned broadcasting a standard NTSC signal on one channel and additional information needed for HDTV reception on a second channel.

DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE

DUAL-DECK VCR ON WAY

By George Mannes

Five years after Go-Video first envisioned selling a VCR that included two VHS decks, the Scotts-

The first dual-deck VCR to be marketed in the US, Go-Video's model VCR-2 enables a viewer to record a TV program while watching a second tape, record



The much-postponed VCR-2: Are two two-head VCRs better than one?

dale, Arizona-based company said it was going to deliver its first shipment of the VCRs on March 28. However, indications are that the deck will not be widely available until later in the year.

two TV shows simultaneously and to dub a program from one VHS tape to another without having to hook up cables between two VCRs. The model, however, will not duplicate tapes that

have been encoded to prevent copying.

A Go-Video spokesperson said at the Winter Consumer Electronics Shows in January that it would be introducing the machine March 28. But large quantities of the machine will not be available until June at the earliest, according to Marshall Layton, a sales manager at D&H Distributing Co., the sole US distributor of the machine. The deck will initially be available at retail outlets in Seattle, San Francisco and possibly Chicago, Layton said.

Go-Video's scheduled introduction of the model comes two years after the company filed a lawsuit alleging a conspiracy among Japanese and Korean manufacturers to prevent production of its machine. Go-Video reached out-of-court settlements with some of the defendants, bringing the company cash payments amounting to \$2 million (see "Special Report: The Strange Tale of the Dual-Deck VCR," March '89 *V/R*). The case will

probably go to trial later this year in US District Court in Phoenix, according to a Go-Video spokesperson.

The VCR-2, which is priced for retail at \$999, features a universal remote control and MTS stereo. Each of its decks has two video heads.

NO ADAPTERS

MULTIFORMAT VCR DEBUTS

The first VCR to accept all VHS formats without an adapter was introduced in February in Japan by JVC.

JVC's model HR-SC1000 plays back and records both full-size and compact cassettes in VHS and Super VHS formats. To

enable loading VHS-C-sized cassettes without adapters, the VCR features a loading tray similar to drawers used to load multiformat disc players.

The machine's S-VHS picture is enhanced by a new video stabilizer and a compensator to eliminate switching noise at the bottom of the frame, according to JVC. The model also features Hi-Fi stereo sound and a remote control with a jog/shuttle wheel.

In Japan, the HR-SC1000 is

WHY HIGH?

FCC Probes Satellite TV Program Cost

By Gary Arlen

America's 3 million satellite dish users may be paying eight times more than the country's 53 million cable TV subscribers to see the same programs—and the Federal Communications Commission is investigating the matter.

Satellite program carriers have not adequately explained why

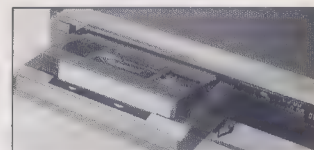
their prices for programming sold to home dish distributors are higher than the rates charged to cable operators, the FCC said in a preliminary report to Congress. Some of the satellite distributors are partly owned by cable TV companies, and the FCC concluded that the pricing practices of satellite carriers raise "disturbing" questions about favorable deals for cable systems. The FCC said it was concerned about the price gap's consumer impact.

But the agency noted, "There does not appear to be a general pattern of discrimination by satellite carriers" in the rates they charge different home dish distributors. Such action would be unlawful under the Satellite Home

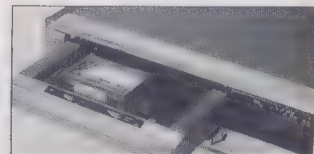
Viewer Copyright Act of 1988.

The FCC's probe—launched at the request of Congress—is focusing on retransmission of superstations such as WOR and WTBS. But the FCC is likely to expand its examination to cable services distributed via satellite networks, such as HBO, ESPN, and MTV. The FCC probe does not involve scrambling or sales practices that have already hiked costs for home dish users.

Capitol Hill friends of home satellite users have not indicated how they will use the preliminary FCC findings. Sen. Albert Gore (D-TN) has already introduced legislation to ban program discrimination between cable, dish and other technologies.



One drawer fits all sizes: HR-SC1000 takes VHS and VHS-C.



priced at roughly \$1,200. JVC has not announced a delivery date or a price for the machine in the US. (G.M.)

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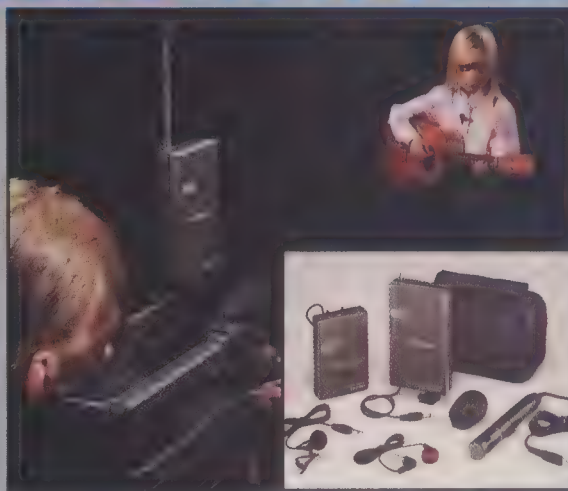
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VIDEO NECESSITIES



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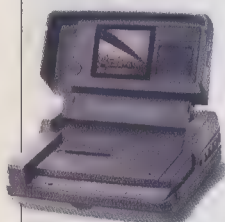
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For additional information, circle No. 83 on Reader Service Card.

BIG TAPES, TINY TVs

Two manufacturers showed portable TV/VCR combos at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show.

Panasonic's PV-M429 A/V Pocket Watch is a model that combines a



four-inch liquid-crystal display (LCD) screen and a VHS VCR that accepts full-size tapes. It opens up like a lap-top computer and weighs 6½ pounds including the battery. The PV-M429 lists for \$1,399.

Panasonic

One Panasonic Way
Secaucus, NJ 07094
(201) 348-9090

Unlike Panasonic's model, Casio's



VF-7000 includes a broadcast TV tuner along with its four-inch LCD screen and VHS VCR. The TV/VCR has audio and video inputs and outputs. It weighs 9½ pounds including the battery and is priced at \$1,290.

Casio

P.O. Box 7000
Dover, NJ 07801
(201) 361-5400

—George Mannes

CANON

Hi8 Camcorder

Model A1 Mark II \$2,299

An upgrade of Canon's top-of-the-line Hi-band 8mm camcorder, the A1 Mark II includes a new auto-focus system that can keep a subject in focus even when it isn't centered in the frame, according to the company. The camcorder comes equipped with an 8-80mm 10x zoom lens and a wireless remote. The model allows for manual exposure control. It weighs four pounds with tape and battery.



Canon

One Jericho Plaza
Jericho, NY 11753
(516) 933-6300

YAMAHA

Audio/Video Amplifier

Model DSP-A700 \$1,099

This A/V amplifier has 12 preset digital sound processing

and provides seven channels of amplification. The two main channel amps deliver 60 watts apiece to 8 ohm speakers; effects and center channels provide 15



settings, including Dolby Surround Pro Logic and simulations of cathedral and rock club environments. The DSP-A700 can also be programmed by the user

watts into 6 ohm speakers.

Yamaha

6722 Orangethorpe Ave.
Buena Park, CA 90620
(714) 522-9105

PANASONIC

Digital Sound Processor

Model SY-DS1 \$250

Panasonic says that the SY-DS1 creates surround-sound-style effects without adding rear speakers to the viewing room. The unique-looking processor also includes an amplifier and two speakers, and connects to any

video source with audio output jacks. The intensity of the surround effect is adjustable. The model sits on or near a TV set.

Panasonic

One Panasonic Way
Secaucus, NJ 07094
(201) 348-9090



PULSAR

Front-Projection Television

Model Concept 2000 \$3,495

Pulsar claims that its video projector can be set up in minutes by consumers. It projects a six-foot diagonal image when placed the prescribed 90 inches from the screen. The projector has an output of 550 lumens, according to the manufacturer. Built to double as a coffee table, the Concept 2000 comes in three finishes: black, natural oak or light walnut. The projector has the capacity for three simultaneous picture-in-picture images. It also has a menu display, 178-channel tuning, MTS stereo including speakers and a wireless remote control. Pulsar



sells a six-foot curved screen along with the projector for an additional \$300.

Pulsar

7676 Clairemont Mesa Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92111
(619) 278-4318

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1. CRITICS CORNER

Video Review contributing editor Ed Hulse reviews five new videos that make their debuts this month. Don't miss what he has to say.

2. VIDEO REVIEW'S READER POLL—VIDEO COLLECTIONS

Tell us how your video collection compares to heavyweight video libraries of more than 2,000 tapes (see associate editor George Mannes' feature on video collectors in this issue). Let us know what TV shows you'd want to hold onto for your personal archive.

3. HARDWARE LINE: CRITICAL EQUIPMENT CARE TIPS

Listen to how you can preserve your equipment's life and rescue it

from the brink of trouble. We'll give you basic care and preventive maintenance hints for your VCR, TV, camcorder and more.

4. THE VIDEO TICKER—GET DAILY UPDATES

Video Review gives you the straight scoop on what's hot and what's not. Call every day for the new titles hitting your video store, and find out what to rent... and what to avoid.

5. PRODUCT WIRE—GET WEEKLY UPDATES

Find out what's happening—before it does. Noted electronics writer Robert Gerson's industry report changes every Wednesday.

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conducted on April 18, 1990 by the publishers of Video Review, whose decisions are final. All prizes will be awarded and winners will be notified by mail. Only one prize per individual or household. Prizes are not transferable and may not be exchanged. All travel must be taken before December 31, 1991. Certain restrictions and black-out dates apply. Accommodations and travel subject to availability and 45-day advance purchase before departure. Please allow six to eight weeks for delivery of prizes. All manufacturers' warranties apply. Taxes, if any, are the responsibility of the winners. Grand prize winner will be required to execute an Affidavit of Eligibility and Publicity/Liability Release. No responsibility is assumed for misdirected or late entries or mail. 4. Contest is open to residents of the U.S. except employees of Viare Publishing Corp., their affiliates, subsidiaries, advertising and promotion agencies, and immediate families. Void in Puerto Rico and wherever else prohibited by law. Subject to all federal, state and local laws. 5. For a list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope by April 30, 1990 to: Video Review April 900 Number Sweepstakes Winners List, 902 Broadway, 20th Floor, NY, NY 10010, ATTN: Promotion Dept.



THE SECOND SCREEN

*An Acclaimed Director Tells How
Home Video Has Changed the Way We Watch Movies —
and the Way He Makes Them*

BY MARTIN SCORSESE

I first heard about home video around 1978 or '79, and I recall my friend Jay Cocks (who writes for *Time* and is just as much a film enthusiast as I am) and I thinking that it was some sort of blessing. The idea that we could go into a store and pick up a paperback-sized cassette of a favorite film, take it home and put on a shelf like a book—well, it was a childhood dream of ours, the idea that you could have a whole wall of your favorite films.

Prior to video, I used to screen pictures all the time, either in a screening room in 35mm or at my home in 16mm. And I still do that, because I feel that the best way to see a movie is as a film, on a screen. I remember doing a lot of screenings when I lived in Los Angeles in the mid-'70s. Many of the directors from that time would come over,

and we showed all kinds of movies. There was a really great exchange of ideas from doing that, and the whole thing was like one long salon—a film salon rather than a literary salon.

With video, this kind of exchange is easier. For example, I'll be talking with my daughter and I'll bring up Karl Freund's *The Mummy*. She hasn't seen a lot of pictures from that era or genre, so if we want to look at it, video makes it possible for me to say, "Oh great, I have the laser disc right here," and we'll throw

that on and look at a scene or maybe at the whole movie. That might lead us into other great horror movies of that time, and also into other directors—from Freund we can cross-reference to James Whale, who made such great movies as *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

So having instant access to movies, being able to pick something up and show it at the drop of the hat, is great. That's the biggest thing. The improving quality is also very important. With the advent of bigger screens, better home sound and the

growing popularity of laser discs, you almost can reproduce, in your home, the theater experience. I'm hopeful that this will change the way people watch movies on home video. If you've got a room in the house with a big-screen monitor and surround sound, maybe you'll start watching movies like movies. In other words, you don't talk to your friends, you don't take phone calls, you don't get up and go to the kitchen and come back. You watch it like you're in a theater.

Because that's the biggest drawback of video. It encourages a shorter attention span. And there are certain films you have to be very careful about. Take Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. It's an extraordinary film, and the Criterion Collection laser disc of it is wonderful. I showed some of it to Powell, who was amazed by the quality of it and how beautiful it looks. But here is a movie that, unless you watch it straight through from beginning to end, you lose the emotion. Now for many years I've been following the progress of *Colonel Blimp*, and the many mutilated versions that have circulated, and it's a miracle to me that this restored version is accessible to so many people now. But when you watch it on video, just please make sure you can sit through the whole two hours and 45 minutes in one sitting, with maybe one little break, because it has an overall emotional effect that's so strong, it stays with you.

The shorter attention span encouraged by television and video also affects, I think, how movies are made today. Your shots have to go faster. You realize sometimes as you're making a film that today's audience may not sit for a shot of a certain length. This may not change the way I'll make a picture. Whatever the pace, if it's right for the shot or scene, that's the way it's got to be—as in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, where a number of sequences take on the tone and mood of the desert. When I was in the desert in Morocco I got a real sense of timelessness, of everything moving at 120 frames per second—extremely slow-motion, almost like a trance. That's part of the effect that I wanted from the movie,

Martin Scorsese is the director of *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, among other highly acclaimed motion pictures. His next movie, *Good Fellas*, which reunites him with actor Robert De Niro, is due out this summer.

and it's part of the reason the movie is two hours and 46 minutes long! I decided that certain elements of *Temptation* would be fast, fine. But in the desert, there's a sense of mysticism you experience that often comes in a trance-like manner. With the combinations of images and sound effects and Peter Gabriel's music, I tried to re-create that mood in certain places. As for my new film, *Good Fellas*, even if it's 2½ hours long, I'm hopeful it will be one of the fastest-paced pictures ever made, because it tells a story in a style heavily influenced by documentary TV reporting and these new tabloid shows.

While I don't let video change the way I pace my movies, I have always been aware that because of the subject matter of a lot of my pictures, they would more than likely find a bigger audience on cable or video than they would in theaters. A very intense movie like *Taxi Driver* would, of course, have to be cut to be put on network TV, because after all it's going into people's homes unsolicited. When we made it, we made it the best way we could for the big screen, and if it ever showed up on television, they would have to do what they had to do to make it palatable. When cable came along, that meant people could see it in full. And I knew, making movies like *After Hours* or *The King of Comedy*, that they would probably be seen by more people on home video. (That's also the case with *The Last Temptation of Christ*, although we never expected the kind of anger and resentment and violent reaction we got. We expected some difficulty at times, but not to that extent.) And that affected my compositions somewhat.

This may change in the future. The public has to be continually re-educated about the importance of maintaining a movie's original aspect ratio on home video. How do you do this? Well, I don't think that academic arguments really convince people. To say that they're missing "more information in a frame" isn't enough. You have to say what this really means, which is that they're missing out on more entertainment. If the viewer's not seeing the whole picture, he's not getting the full enjoyment. That's the thing. Take the letterboxed laser disc of *Die Hard*. It's very different from the cropped or scanned versions on cable or videocassette. A great deal of the strength of pictures by directors like John McTiernan [*Die Hard*] and James Cameron [*Aliens*, *The Abyss*] is in their technical prowess, how they handle sound and editing, how one picture cuts to the next, how one sound cuts to the next. To fully enjoy those strengths, you've got to see the whole picture. Looking at a scanned version—well, if you cut from half a frame to half a frame, you're going to lose the full effect of the movie.

Now that laser discs are introducing letterboxing and, I hope, showing the public that the best possible way of looking at a film at home is in its original aspect ratio, I think from now on I'm going to start shooting in Panavision, and really use the frame in the way Sam Fuller and Nick Ray did—not to mention Max Ophüls in the best widescreen movie of them all, *Lola Montes*. That's just the most remarkable use of widescreen. And

of course there's Anthony Mann. If I could ever go near what Mann did with his wide images in movies like *El Cid* or *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. . . . And now I know that when I shoot in Panavision, there will be at least one video version that will be true to what I shot.

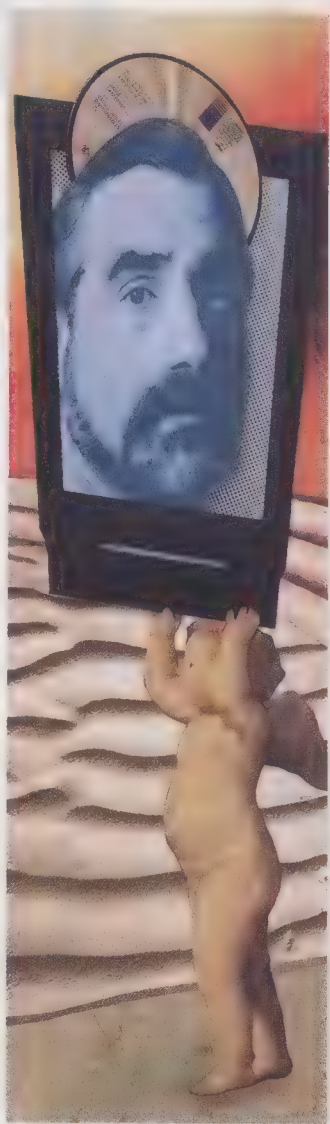
I also like to use video as an educational tool. It's ideal for that. I did a lecture at NYU about a year ago, where I showed the storyboards I drew for the fight scenes in *Raging Bull* on a screen and compared them to how the actual movie came out. In some cases it was absolutely identical. I put the storyboards up on a screen and I showed the scene on video and said, "That shot corresponds to this one, shot number one, and that cuts to this," and it was exactly as storyboarded by me.

In another case, the fight scene in which Sugar Ray Robinson gives Jake LaMotta that horrible beating in the final bout between them, during round 13—"the hard luck round" as the fight announcer puts it—I showed how the final version differed from the storyboards. That ruthless beating, about 20 seconds of film, took 10 days to shoot. And during the editing, we put it together the normal way, shots one, two, three, four and so on—it was a total of 36 setups. We realized after we put it together that we had our structure, but we then discovered other values of movement, lighting, special effects, and started juggling the shots. And it was very interesting to show these film students, through the use of video and my original storyboards, exactly what was done.

You could never show something like that before video. When we were film students we were extremely lucky to get 16mm prints to show. I remember these essentially well-meaning kids who weren't really crazy about film but took film courses anyway. They would get a hold of this beautiful 16mm print of *Citizen Kane*, put it through a Moviola and go back and forth over and over because they were doing a term paper on it and needed to see where all the dissolves were in the opening sequence. Of course, the print got all scratched up. Those prints of *Citizen Kane* are now gone. And these kids all went on to be doctors or lawyers or whatever—they didn't even go into film! Now you can get a tape or disc of it and study it that way, and nothing gets hurt.

Finally, the way video gives a new life to some great films is very important. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* is an excellent example. So is another Powell/Pressburger film, *The Red Shoes*, which, since its restoration and video release, is on its way to becoming a perennial favorite in the tradition of *The Wizard of Oz* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Video also can educate film students and enthusiasts about the neglected masters. I read an article in a magazine recently that lists all the Anthony Mann movies on video, and I think that's great too. A lot of film students today have no reason to know who Anthony Mann was or what he did. So to have video making all these things so readily attainable, for people to learn from and enjoy, is all for the good in the end. □





THE VR 100

Our Editors' Selection of Must-Have Movies for Every Home Video Library

With more and more top-flight movies on videocassette now bearing price tags as low as \$14.95, it's possible to build an impressive collection of great movies to join the great books in your home library. Not every movie available on tape is budget-priced. But thousands of the best *are*, from classics of the '20s and '30s right up to the latest hits of the '80s. Movies that most of us could only rent a few years ago can now easily be owned.

Video Review's editors—movie buffs all—have painstakingly selected the 100 most collectible movies now available on cassette for less than \$39.99. We don't contend that these are the 100 greatest movies ever made, though many belong in that pantheon. Instead, our aim is to provide a sort of "Harvard Classics" of video, a representative sampling of genres, directors, eras and stars that will be the foundation of a first-class home video library.

Actually, we broke the \$39.99 budget in a few cases, for multiple-cassette titles we felt *had* to be on the list (such as *Gone with the Wind*) or those "special editions" that warrant a little splurging, just as coffee-table books do. Furthermore, some titles on our list are only priced below \$39.99 as limited-time promotions. Unfortunately,

some low-priced titles available in the past had to be excluded, because they have been either with-

drawn from circulation (such as *Star Wars*) or put on temporary moratorium (such as *The Wizard of Oz*) by their producers or distributors. The editors making the selection: Stephen A. Booth, Doug Brod, Janice Ellinghausen, Roy Hemming, Glenn Kenny, George Mannes, John R. Quain and Beth Sherman.

Clockwise from top: *Bambi's* Thumper, *Streetcar's* Brando, *From Here to Eternity*, *Duck Soup*.



ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN (1948). A classic horror-comedy. Wolfman Lon Chaney KOs Dracula Bela Lugosi and saves the Monster from a brain transplant—Lou's! (MCA, \$19.95)

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD (1938). In the ultimate swash-buckler, Errol Flynn robs the rich to feed the poor and woos Maid Marian (Olivia de Havilland). (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

THE AFRICAN QUEEN (1951). Forget Bogie. Forget Hepburn. Credit the Congo River, John Huston's trained leeches and 12-year-old Scotch for the birth of comic Method acting. (CBS/Fox, \$29.98)

AIRPLANE! (1980). Lloyd Bridges, Leslie Nielsen and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar slam-dunk the disaster genre. It's a non-stop flight filled with laughs. (Paramount, \$14.95)

ALIEN (1979). Oscar-winning F/X make for a five-alarm tummy-churner. Only Sigourney Weaver had the stomach for a double dip. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

ANIMAL HOUSE (1978). College like it used to be, when the slobs snubbed the snobs and the *National Lampoon* seemed funny. John Belushi graduates *magna cum loudly*. (MCA, \$19.95)

AU REVOIR LES ENFANTS (1987). Louis Malle's powerful retelling of a fateful incident from his own childhood in Nazi-occupied France. (Orion, \$19.98)

BAMBI (1942). Here's Disney animation to charm the young and used-to-be-young alike. What more can you ask of a classic? (Disney, \$26.99)

BLAZING SADDLES (1974). The Borscht Belt *How the West*

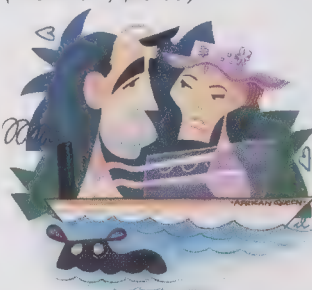
Was Won according to Mel Brooks (with help from Richard Pryor). (Warner, \$19.98)

BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1935). A sequel that tops the original in chills and wit. With Boris Karloff, Elsa Lanchester. (MCA, \$19.95)

BULL DURHAM (1988). Though it's a hilarious comedy on and off the baseball diamond, with Kevin Costner and Susan Sarandon, it's also the best movie tribute ever to the national pastime. Written and directed by Ron Shelton, himself an ex-pro ballplayer. (Orion, \$19.98)

CABIN IN THE SKY (1943). Vincente Minnelli's whimsical musical fable about emissaries from heaven and hell competing for the soul of a poor sharecropper. With Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, Eddie Anderson, Louis Armstrong, Rex Ingram, Duke Ellington and band. (MGM/UA, \$24.95)

CASABLANCA (1943). Play it again, Dooley. And again. Bogart, Bergman, Rains, Henreid, Lorre, Veidt, Greenstreet and Wilson remain indelible in black and white. (MGM/UA, \$29.95)



The African Queen

CHINATOWN (1974). The City of Angels circa 1930, with Jack Nicholson as the best wisecracking, hard-boiled private dick ever. Faye Dunaway, John Huston and director Roman Polanski himself are cast. (Paramount, \$19.95)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL (1951). Alastair Sim's Scrooge still has his first nickel and Marley's ghost will scare the Dickens. The superb cast makes all other versions humbug. (United, \$14.95)

CITIZEN KANE (1941). Or *How to Start a War of the Worlds with the Hearst Publishing Empire*. Rosebuds for Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten, the Mercury Players, cinematographer Gregg Toland. (RKO/ Turner, \$19.98)

DIABOLIQUE (1955). As chilling a thriller as you'll ever see. A hated schoolmaster just won't stay dead despite the plottings of his wife and his mistress. (Cable Films, \$24.95)

DIRTY DANCING (1987). The zip and zest of the dance numbers complement a sharply etched coming-of-age story, set at a Catskills resort in the early '60s. With Patrick Swayze, Jennifer Grey, Honi Coles. (Vestron, \$19.98)

DRACULA (1931). An old-time frighter you can really sink your teeth into. Fog-shrouded graveyards, spooky castle and Bela Lugosi as the one and only Count. (MCA, \$19.95)

DUCK SOUP (1933). Hail Freedonia! All four of the fun Marxists star in an anthem to anarchism. Best bit: Generalissimo Groucho pulls down the shade after a cannonball enters his window. (MCA, \$19.95)

ELMER GANTRY (1960). Sinclair Lewis' hellfire and brimstone preacher is still the most mesmerizing—and vile—of the religious con men swindling in the name of God. With Burt Lancaster. (MGM/UA, \$29.95)

E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982). Steven Spielberg broke the bank here—and hearts all over the galaxy on the way. Touching and life-affirm-

ing—has anyone *not* seen it? (MCA, \$24.95)

THE EXORCIST (1973). It sent the pea-soup business to hell and didn't enlist many recruits for the Jesuits. But it's the *Alien* of demonic-possession flicks, and launched a legion of ersatz soupers. (Warner, \$19.98)



Citizen Kane

FORT APACHE (1948). John Wayne dukes it out with Henry Fonda in the first and best of John Ford's cavalry classics. (RKO/ Turner, \$19.98)

THE FRENCH CONNECTION (1971). Drug smugglers lost on the sidewalks and subways of New York. With the chase scene to end all chase scenes. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY (1953). Army life on the eve of World War II. The all-star cast doesn't trip over itself, though Frank Sinatra shines here in a return from obscurity. (RCA/Columbia, \$29.95)

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE (1963). Vintage 007, with a debonair Sean Connery. Bond before Q's gee-whiz gimcracks overshadowed the plots. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

Left to right: *Chinatown*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, *Bull Durham*.



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*Requires separate picture source, such as VCR.



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Gunga Din

THE GRAPES OF WRATH (1939). Welcome to Depression America. John Steinbeck told the Joad family's story. John Ford, Henry Fonda, Jane Darwell and a fine cast bring it to life. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

GREAT EXPECTATIONS (1946). Dickens' always memorable characters jump from the screen in David Lean's epic version. The author couldn't have directed the graveyard scene better. (Paramount, \$19.95)

GUNGA DIN (1939). Waterboy Sam Jaffe helps Cary Grant and Victor McLaglen save the empire in this brawling tale of British "Eend-jah," spun from Kipling's poem. (RKO/Turner, \$19.98)

GUYS AND DOLLS (1955). Damon Runyon rounds up gamblers, gold diggers and the usual suspects for some singing and dancing. Marlon Brando's musical debut. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

HALLOWEEN (1978). The first and best of the contemporary psycho-slashers. A fave among balcony romeos and cinema historians. (Media, \$19.95)

HAMLET (1948). Laurence Olivier's best Shakespeare. Goodnight, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! (Paramount, \$19.95)

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT (1964). A rock musical that works. The Fab Four's recap of a zany day in the life of Beatlemania. (MPI, \$29.95)

HIGH NOON (1952). A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do, and what Sheriff Gary Cooper's gotta do ain't a job for clock-watchers. (Republic, \$19.95)

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1939). First of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce—and still the best. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (1956). The still-scary McCarthy-era version, in which a pinko pod sows subversive fifth columnists in the pumpkin patch. (Republic, \$19.95)



A Hard Day's Night

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT (1934). Frank Capra's quintessential Depression-era comedy in which starving newspaperman Clark Gable and poor-little-rich-girl Claudette Colbert learn to get along. (RCA/Columbia, \$29.95)

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (1946). Capra, in cahoots with a guardian angel, helps James Stewart make sense of his life. Not just for Christmas, and not in color. (Republic, \$19.95)

JAWS (1975). Take a dip at the shore? You'll hesitate to take a bath in your own home after watching this Spielberg-directed thriller. (MCA, \$19.95)

KING KONG (1933). The version that put the Empire State Building on the map and still keeps the natives restless. (RKO/Turner, \$19.98)

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA (1962). The recently restored version lets you see the entire wide-screen epic as director David Lean envisioned. Peter O'Toole stars. (RCA/Columbia, \$29.95)

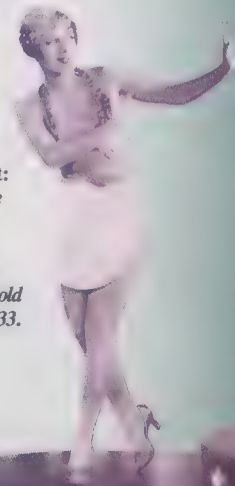
THE LION IN WINTER (1968). O'Toole again, as England's Henry II, battling with queenly Katharine Hepburn over which son inherits the business. (Nelson, \$14.98)

THE MALTESE FALCON (1941). Bogie writes the manual for cynical, hard-boiled dicks as Sam Spade. The third movie version of the bird, and the best. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

A MAN AND A WOMAN (1966). Proof that love can be sweeter the second time around. With Jean-Louis Trintignant and Anouk Aimee. (CBS/Fox, \$24.98)

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (1962). From friend and foe alike, war hero Sinatra gets a raw deal. Follow that Queen of Diamonds. With Angela Lansbury, Laurence Harvey, Janet Leigh. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK (1944). Preston Sturges' daring and very funny wartime comedy about a girl (Betty Hutton) who can't remember how she got in a family way. (Paramount, \$29.95)



Left to right: Hamlet, The Grapes of Wrath, The Manchurian Candidate, Gold Diggers of 1933.

THE GENERAL (1927). Fact: Union agents steal Confederate train called the General. Farce: Buster Keaton sets out to retrieve it. One of the great silent comedies. (HBO, \$39.99)

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES (1953). Two little gals from Little Rock (Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell) set Paris burning. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

THE GODFATHER. Going once (1972), going twice (1974), going three times (the 7½-hour 1977 Saga). Choose any offer, but you can't refuse "Family" entertainment of this caliber. (Paramount, \$29.95 each for parts I and II; \$179.95 for special edition of the three-cassette Saga)

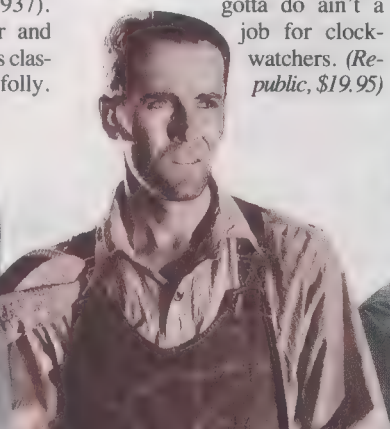
GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933 (1933). How Busby Berkeley turned the Hollywood musical on its head, with fancy footwork by Ruby Keeler, Ginger Rogers. (MGM/UA, \$29.95)

GONE WITH THE WIND (1939). Sure it's a soaper but, frankly, we don't give a damn. See George "Superman" Reeves without his union suit. (MGM/UA, \$89.95 for two-cassette set)

GRAND ILLUSION (1937). What if they gave a war and nobody came? Jean Renoir's classic of WWI carnage and folly. (Cable Films, \$24.95)



The Music Man



MR. HULOT'S HOLIDAY (1963). Murphy's Law applied hilariously to a French summer resort, via the inimitable Jacques Tati. (Nelson, \$29.98)

THE MUSIC MAN (1962). Robert Preston's spunk and Meredith Willson's score calm the troubles in turn-of-the-century River City. (Warner, \$24.98)



The Searchers

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968). Often imitated, never equaled. Low-budget B&W production gives extra zing to this George Romero horror classic. The colorized version shortchanges the imagination. (Cable Films, \$24.95)

NINOTCHKA (1939). Long before *glasnost*, Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas found ways to ease East-West tensions in one of Ernst Lubitsch's funniest romantic romps. (MGM/UA, \$24.95)

NORTH BY NORTHWEST (1959). If you can have only one Hitchcock thriller, this is it. Gets our vote to add Cary Grant, cleft and all, to the Mount Rushmore monument. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

ON THE WATERFRONT (1954). Marlon Brando scores a knockout as the pigeon-loving expug in this Oscar-winning drama of harbor-union corruption. Also stars Lee J. Cobb, Rod Steiger, Karl Malden and Eva Marie Saint. (RCA/Columbia, \$29.95)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (1975). A memorable tribute to the

human spirit, pitting a feisty mental patient (Jack Nicholson) against a tyrannical head nurse (Louise Fletcher). Bravo! (HBO, \$19.99)

PATHS OF GLORY (1957). Stanley Kubrick takes on previous glorifications of war with a riveting movie based on a true WWI incident. The exceptional cast includes Kirk Douglas, Ralph Meeker. (MGM/UA, \$29.95)

PLATOON (1986). The Vietnam War from the grunts' point of view, with few pulled punches. With Tom Berenger, Martin Sheen, Willem Dafoe, Kevin Dillon. (Vestron, \$19.98)

PSYCHO (1960). Hitchcock's scariest thriller, interpreted by some as an allegory on the psychological disintegration of



The Road Warrior

America itself in the 1960s. With Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh. (MCA, \$19.95)

RAGING BULL (1980). Robert De Niro won an Oscar for his portrayal of prizefighter Jake LaMotta, forever shadowboxing with his personal demons. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (1981). Steven Spielberg's homage to the Saturday-matinee serials of yesteryear. Loaded with action, intrigue and breathtaking cliffhangers for the intrepid In-

diana Jones (Harrison Ford). (Paramount, \$19.95)

RAISING ARIZONA (1987). The flakiest of the '80s comedies, capsizing certain conventional family values with irony and hilarity. (CBS/Fox, \$19.98)

RE-ANIMATOR (1985). Stage director Stuart Gordon's first stab at the movies is this wildly inventive update of an H.P. Lovecraft mad-scientist tale. A better horror flick hasn't been made since. (Vestron, \$19.98)

RED RIVER (1948). There's barely an encouraging word on the range between rebellious youth (Montgomery Clift) and set-in-his-ways old-timer (John Wayne). (Key, \$19.95)

ROAD TO UTOPIA (1946). In



Raging Bull

WWI vet who drifts into crime and, eventually, swaps slugs with former trenchmate Bogart. The church-steps finale remains one of Hollywood's best closing scenes. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

ROBOCOP (1987). Clang, clang, clang go the villains as director Paul Verhoeven takes on the sci-fi/action genre and succeeds smashing. (Orion, \$19.98)

THE SEARCHERS (1956). In the crowning achievement of John Wayne's career, Duke portrays a grim-visaged avenging angel, tracking Indians who killed his kinfolk and kidnapped his niece (Natalie Wood). Classic John Ford western hits the bull's-eye. (Warner, \$19.98)


THE SEVEN SAMURAI (1954). Akira Kurosawa's action-packed "Eastern western," about 16th-century samurai warriors who save a village from ruthless bandits. (Nelson, \$39.98)

THE SEVENTH SEAL (1956). Ingmar Bergman's dark parable of a disillusioned knight returning from the Crusades who matches wits with Death in a game of chess. With Max von Sydow. (Nelson, \$29.98)

SHANE (1953). All the mythic archetypes of western lore blend seamlessly in this motion picture. Alan Ladd rides tall as the veteran gunfighter protecting homesteaders. (Paramount, \$14.95)

Left to right: *The Seven Samurai*, *Ninotchka*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *North by Northwest*.





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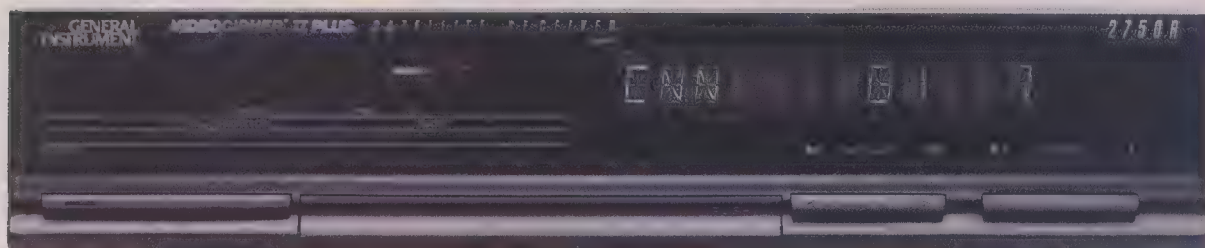
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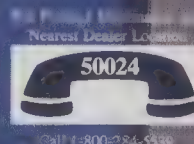
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SHOW BOAT (1936). As close to a definitive version of the Kern-Hammerstein-Ferber musical classic as you can get—thanks to Paul Robeson, Helen Morgan, Irene Dunne, Charles Winninger and cast. (MGM/UA, \$24.95)

SINGIN' IN THE RAIN (1952). Hollywood's transformation from silents to talkies turned into a musical-comedy via Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds and Cyd Charisse. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)



Singin' in the Rain

THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD (1965). This successful screen adaptation of John Le Carre's cold-war thriller, with Richard Burton cast as a disillusioned spy facing the end of his career, takes all the glamour out of espionage. (Paramount, \$19.95)

STAGECOACH (1939). John Ford's first sound western, and the movie that made John Wayne a star. No grade-B horse opera, it emphasizes character and plot over action. (Warner, \$19.98)

A STAR IS BORN (1954). Life at movieland's top—and bottom—with Judy Garland at her musical and dramatic peak. James Mason's performance is great too, as is the Arlen-Gershwin score. (Warner, \$29.98)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE (1951). *Stellar!* And on track all the way. With unfor-

gettable performances by Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando—with or without the kindness of Tennessee Williams' strangers. (Warner, \$29.98)

SUNSET BOULEVARD (1951). Billy Wilder's cynical tale of a faded movie queen's (Gloria Swanson) delusions of a comeback. With William Holden. (Paramount, \$19.95)

SWING TIME (1936). Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers sing and dance in and out of romantic jams and Art Deco settings, to one of Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields' very best scores. (RKO/Turner, \$19.98)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (1956). Cecil B. DeMille's second shot at the life of Moses. The spectacular visual effects include parting the Red Sea—in Technicolor, no less. (Paramount, \$29.95)

THE TERMINATOR (1984). For once, Arnold Schwarzenegger's thespic limitations are negligible. He plays a robotic bounty hunter, sent from the future to kill Linda Hamilton today. The furious pace never lags. (HBO, \$19.99)

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT! (1974). That's understatement! A compilation of the best musical numbers from MGM's Golden Age with Astaire, Kelly, Garland, Crosby, Horne, Rogers, Gable, Sinatra, MacDonald, Eddy, Durante and many others. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

THE THIN MAN (1934). This proved that Hollywood could cross-breed whodunits with comedies. The first of six with William Powell and Myrna Loy as sleuthing spouses Nick and Nora Charles. (MGM/UA, \$24.95)

THE THIRD MAN (1949). The



2001: A Space Odyssey

haunting theme song is just one memorable thing from this stylish thriller of postwar Vienna. Carol Reed directed from a script by Graham Greene. A relatively slim Orson Welles steals the show as black marketeer Harry Lime. (Republic, \$19.95)

THIS IS SPINAL TAP (1984). Rob Reiner's directorial debut is a hilarious sendup of rockumentaries and concert films. Michael McKean, Christopher Guest, Harry Shearer and Reiner head a cast studded with familiar faces. (Nelson, \$14.98)

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD (1962). Slowly paced, emotion-charged drama of Jim Crow South, with Gregory Peck as the lawyer for a black defendant accused of rape. Great dialogue and courtroom scenes. (MCA, \$24.95)

TOP HAT (1935). It breathes an atmosphere that simply reeks with the class of Astaire, Rogers, Irving Berlin. The cheek-to-cheekiest of their movie musicals. (RKO/Turner, \$19.98)

THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE (1948). Bogie, Tim Holt and Walter Huston set out to find gold in Mexico, but are overtaken by greed, suspicion and worse. Director John Huston's finest work, from B. Traven's finest novel. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

(1968). Sci-fi movies haven't been quite the same since Stanley Kubrick's eye-filling epic, which placed space exploration in the larger context of man against nature—and machine. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

THE WAGES OF FEAR (1952). Edge-of-your-seat suspense in a gritty chronicle of four truck-jockeys' journey chaperoning nitro shipments through the South American jungle. (Hollywood Home Theatre, \$34.95)

WEST SIDE STORY (1961). Romeo and Juliet pungently updated to Manhattan's teen gangs via Jerome Robbins' choreography, Leonard Bernstein's music and Stephen Sondheim's lyrics. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT (1988). The ultimate blend of live-action and animation. Director Bob Zemeckis convinces us that Roger and his fellow "toons" exist alongside actor Bob Hoskins and cast. (Touchstone, \$22.99)



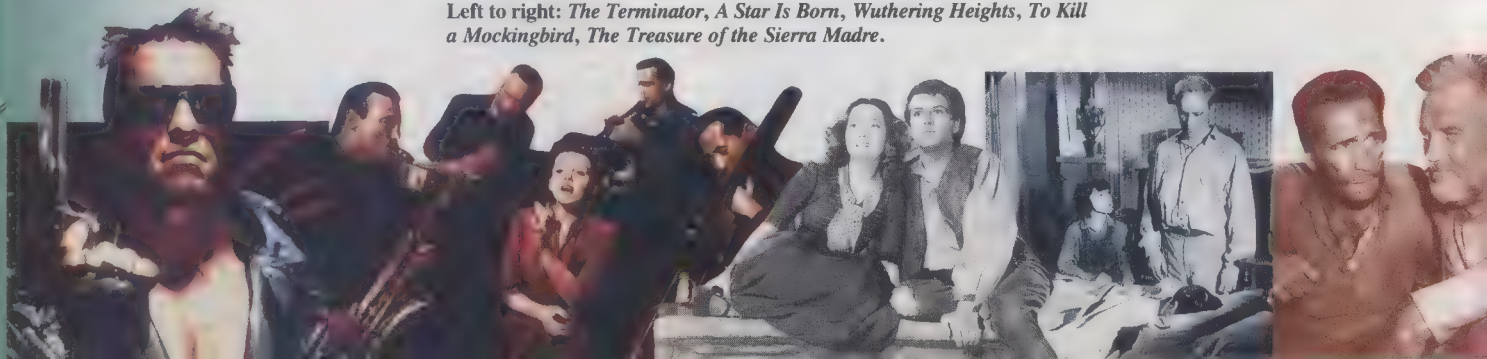
Swing Time

WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1939). The best (if only partial) screen adaptation of Emily Bronte's gothic novel. Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon play the star-crossed lovers in 19th-century England. (Nelson, \$14.98)

YANKEE DOODLE DANDY (1942). Gets our regards just for James Cagney as Broadway song-and-dance man George M. Cohan and as a memorable slice of Americana. (MGM/UA, \$19.95)

ZULU (1964). Breathtaking panoramas and combat sequences recommend this historical spectacle about a small British garrison besieged by Zulu legions. (Nelson, \$19.98)

Left to right: *The Terminator*, *A Star Is Born*, *Wuthering Heights*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.



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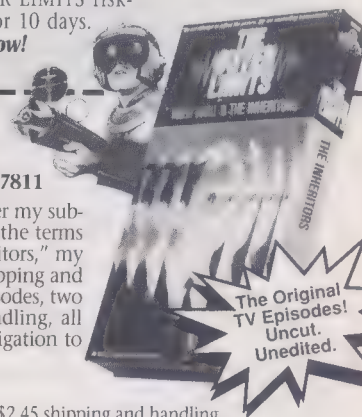
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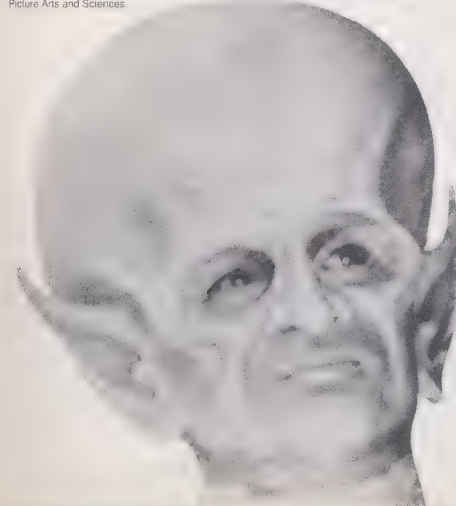
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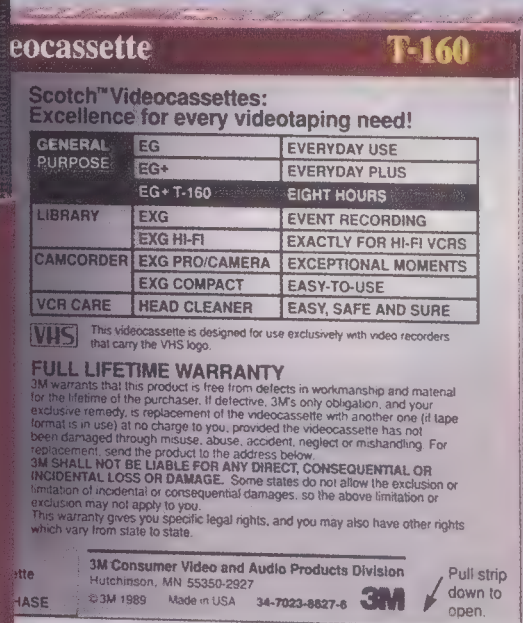
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VIDEOCASSETTE



MOVIES ON VIDEO

*From the Bijou to the Boudoir —
the History of Cinema-to-Go*

BY DAVID HAJDU



It's almost physics. Ten years go, a movie was *nothing*—a mere experience, an hour-and-a-half of fleeting sensations in a big, dark place. If you fell asleep, got some sort of pain or gave too much thought to how much the tickets had cost, hey, you missed out. Now, however, you actually get a *thing*—a plastic, tangible object you can pick up, carry around, watch, stop, replay, freeze-frame, fast-forward, shelf, share, give away or save 'til you feel like doing something with it. This singular development—the transformation of the nature of the motion picture from the experiential to the physical—cuts to the very essence of home video entertainment. All the news and events related to video movies over the course of the video decade stem from this one, basically weird phenomenon.

After all, it wasn't home video, but ordinary TV that introduced entertainment to the small screen and home environment half a century ago. And it was cable that first brought full-length, uncut movies to the tube, demystifying and deglamorizing mo-

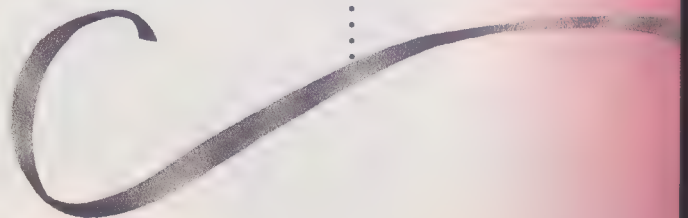
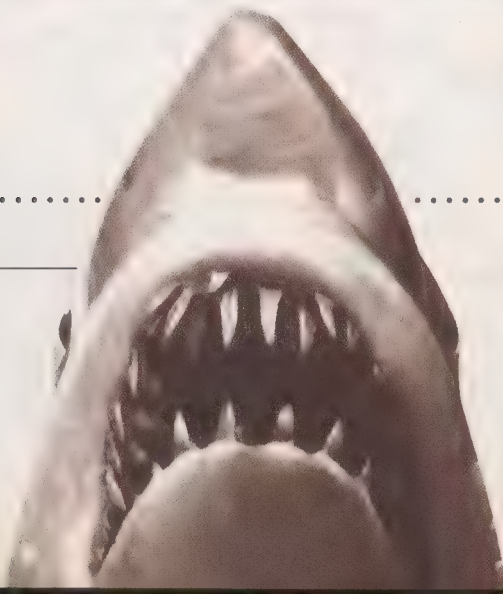
tion pictures years before the VCR. Still, it was cassettes and VCRs that first (and exclusively) enabled home viewers to (1) choose whatever programs they wanted, whenever they wanted; (2) control the viewing process with freeze-frame, slow-motion and other playback techniques, much like reading a book; (3) own their own movies and build collections; and (4) watch programming in convenient portions over any desired period of time. All this became possible once movies were transformed into little plastic things.

The *concept* of movies as personal possessions wasn't new when the first "prerecorded" videocassettes became available in August 1976. Hollywood bigwigs had had private home screening rooms since the '20s, and thousands of serious cinema enthusiasts had been collecting movies on 8-, 16- and even 35mm film reels since the '50s. Moreover, as early as 1971, at least one book, *The Total Film-Maker* by Jerry Lewis (yes, that Jerry Lewis), had predicted, "It's only a matter of time

FAST SCAN

Dec. 1978
First laser disc movie: *Jaws*. The two-disc CAV version, on the MCA/Discoverion label, sold for \$29.95.

Illustration: Michael Okamoto



before home cassettes will revolutionize [movie] distribution."

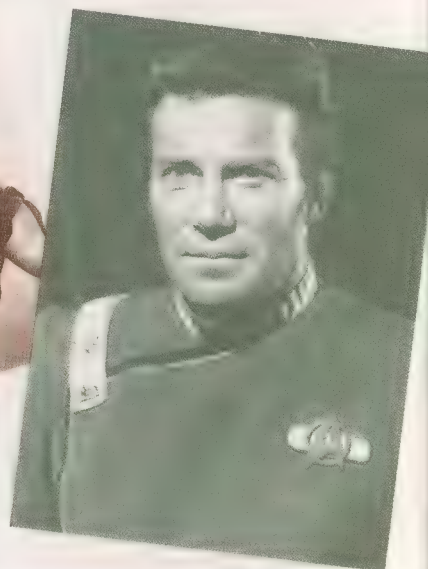
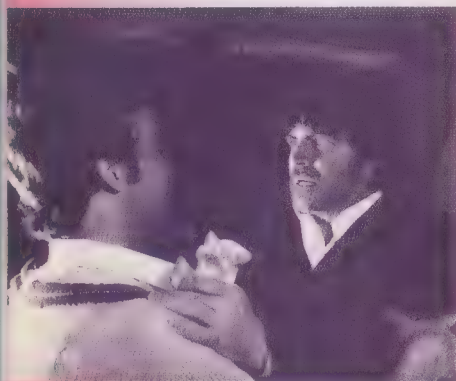
Most of the original prerecorded cassette releases in the late '70s were instructional programs, such as the very first video title, *The Dick Cavett Speed-Reading Course*. But regular movies came shortly thereafter. Actually, they weren't *exactly* regular movies, as *Green Acres*' Hank Kimball would have said. They were *dirty* movies. But a few legit pictures whose rights had fallen into the public domain followed suit by early 1980, when *Video Review* made its debut. In fact, in order to compare all the versions of Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* available at one time, one of our reviewers, William K. Everson, had to screen 10 different cassettes.

Our first feature review, by Andrew Sarris, was of a movie called *The Shout*, selected because it was the first full-length movie to be released in the United States on cassette *before* its national theatrical run. That was because it never *had* a national theatrical run, since nobody outside New York, where it had a brief art-house life, understood what it was about. *The Shout* is all the more historic, therefore, as the first movie to be puffed up as an original, never-before-seen video production, mainly because its producers knew it was a boxoffice

turkey. We liked something about *The Shout*, anyway, and even gave it a *Video Review Award* (ViRA) in our first anniversary issue.

Prices for cassettes were originally high (around \$60) while quality was low; but both grew progressively higher over the course of the first two-thirds of the video decade. Only in the past few years have retail prices begun dropping to more affordable levels, especially for older classics or the most popular newer movies. At the same time, ongoing advances in tape stock and film-to-tape transfer, as well as VCR breakthroughs such as stereo, Hi-Fi and S-VHS, have fueled perpetual improvements in picture and sound quality. By the late '80s, in fact, most of the major movie studios found themselves retransferring and remastering dozens of movies released previously, in order to keep up with improvements in technical quality.

At first, all cassettes were *sold* to movie buffs; there was no such thing as a rental. Accordingly, there was rarely any such thing as a sale, since retail prices were so high. When a few stores finally invented the tape rental, as their way of trying to



May 1981
First major
release in two-
cassette set:
*Scenes from a
Marriage*.

April 1981
First ViRAs.
Best movie
(new): *The
Shout*. Best
movie (classic):
*That's
Entertainment!*

Dec. 1981
First Elvis
movies re-
leased. Eight in
all, including
G.I. Blues.
Francis Cop-
pola's edit-
ed-for-video
*The Godfather
Epic* released.

July 1982
Warner's
"Night at the
Movies" series
released; in-
cludes classic
movies,
newsreels,
trailers and
cartoons from
the period of
main
attraction.

Dec. 1982
*Star Trek II:
The Wrath of
Khan* released
by Paramount
at "budget
price" of
\$39.95.

May 1983
Francois Tru-
faut blasts
home video for
sins of fast-
scan feature:
"People will
be skipping
past parts of
movies. It is a
crime against
cinema."

Feb. 1984
VR reviews
10 different
versions of
Hitchcock's *The
39 Steps*.

April 1984
VR awards first
and last ViRAs
(Video's
Lowest Echelon
of Software).
"Winners"
included
*The Erotic
Adventures of
Pinocchio*.



stay in business, no one (including *VR*) knew if the experiment was legal. As the issue rose in public awareness, Congress took it up and cooked up a new law regulating videotape transactions, the Consumer Video Sales/Rental amendment. Fortunately, by the time the bill came out of committee, the year was 1984, and the only way to enforce it would be to shake down 30 million voting movie fans who were renting every week. The bill was never passed.

In the same period access to R- and X-rated programming for minors in video stores was heating up as the next serious video issue. For this, several state governments took the initiative and successfully adopted laws restricting the availability of R and X titles before Congress had a chance to organize a fact-finding committee. In this case, however, the issue was quieted—if not resolved—by strictly voluntary efforts on the part of videocassette companies and stores. (Poor Congress. Nobody would let it pass any video laws all decade.)

All in all, by the time the video decade was approaching its end, it was clear that videocassettes had been changing the way we spent our time more profoundly than any phenomenon since TV itself.

Renting has become a social event, and browsing the video store is almost as popular as cruising the mall. Okay, nothing is as popular as cruising the mall—forgive our biased blasphemy. But, along with the failure of shop-at-home services, the vitality of the tape store suggests that video won't really be the end of conversation and socialization, after all.

Since the emergence of cassettes, movies have also come back as the common cultural link they were before the advent of television. Everybody's a movie buff again, discovering the classics and following the careers of up-and-comers—including the middle-aged and senior citizens who hadn't been to theaters since the days when they had only four screens. Catching up on the latest, or looking back on the perennials, are hobbies that bridge generations. Providing something of a shock to the moviehouse business, cassettes have actually sparked a recent return to theaters, rather than an escape from them.

Indeed, if movies are the literature of the postliterate age, the cassette is the hardcover, and our tape libraries are our personal symbol of what we have become. □

May 1984

Congress takes up rental issue with proposed Consumer Video Sales/Rental Amendment. Movies get colorized. First victims: *Topper*, *Of Mice and Men*.

Oct. 1984

State of Maryland restricts minors' access to R- and X-rated cassettes.



Nov. 1984

First Hi-Fi movie cassettes: *Moscow on the Hudson*, *This Is Spinal Tap*, *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*. First laser discs

with supplementary materials and alternate soundtracks: *King Kong* and *Citizen Kane*, both from the Criterion Collection.

Nov. 1989

Batman hits video while still in theatrical release.

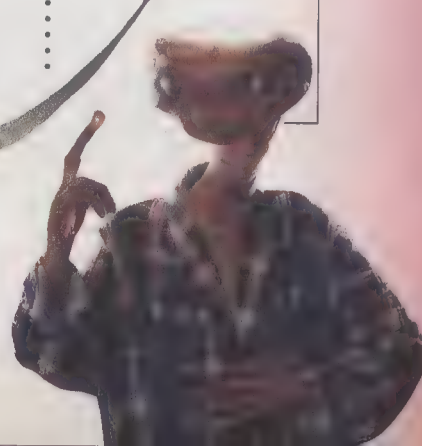
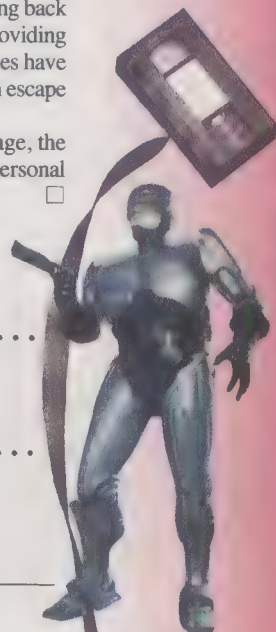
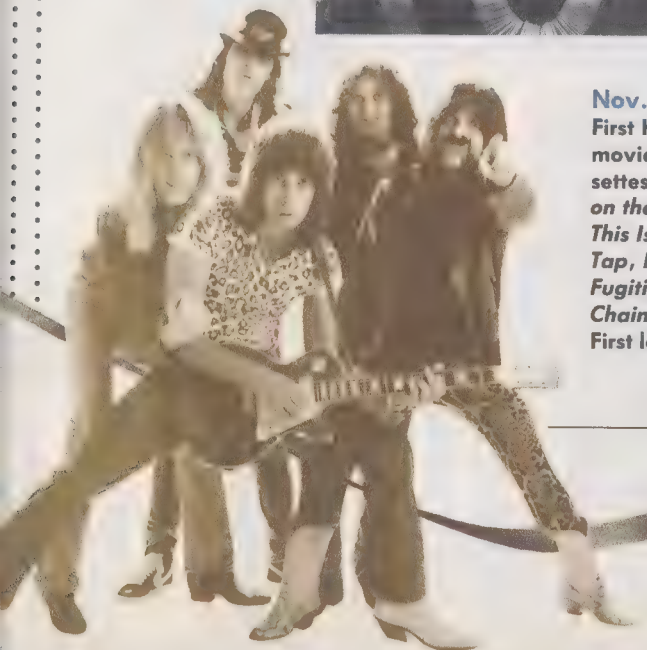
Jan. 1989

First S-VHS release: *RoboCop*.

Dec. 1984
Woody Allen's *Manhattan* becomes first letterboxed cassette.

April 1988

Steven Spielberg gives in, and the long-awaited video release of *E.T.* is announced.



10 PRODUCTS THAT ADVANCED HOME VIDEO

The Betamax video format will always be remembered as the starting point from which the ongoing history of home video proceeds. The products that followed, shown here, advanced and helped define the ways we use and enjoy video today.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:

THE CAMCORDER: Lugging around a separate camera and VCR was an awfully cumbersome way of making home movies. Packaging the camera and recorder in a single chassis was something else again. People took to the streets, and the home moviemaking revolution began. Pictured: the very first camcorder, Sony's BMC-100 Betamovie.

THE BIG-SCREEN TV: When you consider that the first television image showed up on a screen of five inches, the dimensions of today's pictures seem awesome indeed. Front projection is still big with media-room mavens, and may become bigger still if the current LCD projectors take off. But for most people, the big-screen set is either rear projection, or more impressive still, direct view. Years ago a really big tube set was deemed a physical impossibility. Today, sets larger than 30 inches are practically commonplace, making it impossible to denigrate the home video experience with references to "the small screen." Pictured: Mitsubishi's 35-inch CS-3503R.

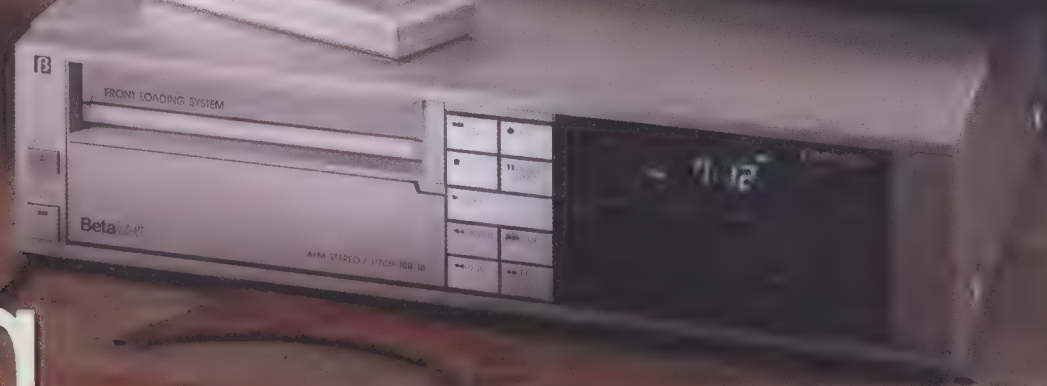
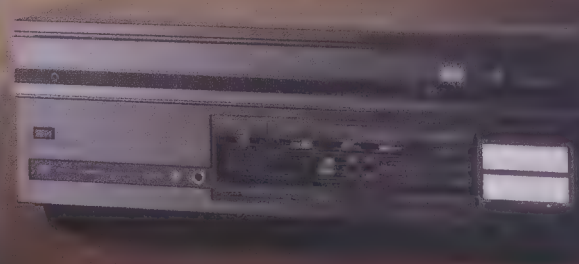
THE COMBI PLAYER: Much of the new awareness of the laser format can be attributed to the combination—or combi—player, which plays both laser videodiscs and audio compact discs. Hardware manufacturers were quite canny to paint some of the CD's glitter onto laser. Pictured: the first combi player, Pioneer's CLD-900.

THE VHS VCR: The controversy still rages among videophiles about the format that displaced Beta and went on to dominate the field. All other arguments aside, VHS was the hands-down winner in the first full-blown format war, and refinements in the format—the latest being digital audio—continue. Pictured: the very first VHS deck, JVC's 3300.

THE HI-FI VCR: The innovative Hi-Fi audio recording system, first in Beta, then VHS, gave us the first reasonable approximation of what we heard—or at least were supposed to have heard—in theaters. This important innovation was the real beginning of the "audio for video" category. Pictured: Toshiba's flagship Beta Hi-Fi model, the VS-36.



BREAKTHROUGH



HS

© 1985 JVC Corporation of America



BR



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

THE A/V AMPLIFIER: A relatively recent development, the audio/video amp is the component that takes the concept of a unified entertainment system out of the esoteric realm and into the mainstream. The key idea is integration; by putting audio and video amplification together, along with extras like Dolby Surround, the A/V amp becomes the media room centerpiece—the stick that stirs the drink. Pictured: a recent model of the kitchen-sink variety, Pioneer's VSX-9500S, along with its multifunction remote control (a product that is probably the most essential and the most underappreciated in video).

THE MONITOR: As the Video Age got into full swing, the fact that a television could be more than just a television did not go unnoticed by certain visionary manufacturers. By introducing the idea of real component video, the Proton 600M (pictured) monitor paved the way for a new perception of television. Suddenly, a TV could be a status symbol again. More important, the improved picture quality of this model opened people's eyes. Without the popularity of the monitor, the concept of the monitor/receiver might still be a foreign one today.

THE LCD SCREEN: It began as a bit of a joke—the technology that would bring us the Dick Tracy wristwatch/TV, only with a really poor picture. But as active matrix technology improved the image quality, and as “personal video” suddenly became an issue, the LCD screen went from stepchild to star. LCDs will continue to have an impact in new ways—already, LCD front-projection systems from Sharp and JVC are making their marks. Pictured: a Japan-only, four-inch LCD TV from Sharp.

STEREO TV: The mid-'80s introduction of MTS—multichannel television sound—inspired a lot of weak wags to imagine, say, how *The Tonight Show* would change. The idea of Ed McMahon's laugh booming from the left channel was not particularly clever, nor was it an accurate representation of the enjoyment stereo TV would bring to millions. While programs that use stereo imaginatively are still rare, those that do—like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—are terrific, and face it, where would MTV or VH-1 be without TV stereo? Pictured: Recoton's F.R.E.D., the first external MTS decoder.

THE HANDYCAM: The camcorder integrated the camera and recorder. Sony's Handycam, using the 8mm tape format, brought unprecedented portability to video moviemaking. When the 8mm format was announced in 1983, VHS manufacturers were suddenly put on the defensive. They responded by truncating the VHS cassette and calling it VHS-C (C for compact). This format war keeps escalating as manufacturers continue to, as Steve Martin might have put it, “get small.” Pictured: the very first Handycam, the still impressively small CCD-MU8, next to its latest cousin, the CCD-TR5, which is tinier still.

PEAK THROUGHS

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VIDEO VISIONS



PAUL NEWMAN

Actor
The Color of Money, Blaze

Video certainly has changed the economics of the movie business considerably. And you know what has happened to people's attention spans, not to mention the extent to which everything is now designed for the lowest common denominator.

Frankly, I don't understand this—but there are going to be vast changes in the way we deal with entertainment and the way the public deals with us. I think I may end up in the '90s as a dinosaur in this business.

I can't really make any prophesies of exactly what's going to happen. Video has unleashed a force that's probably uncontrollable. Just where it's going to lead, I don't know. I don't think anybody does.

STRETCHING IT

STEPHEN BURUM

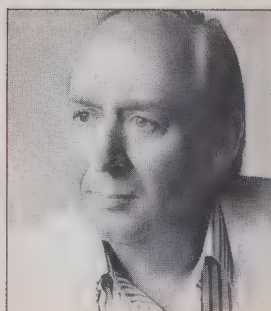
Cinematographer
Casualties of War,
The War of the Roses

I shoot a lot of pictures in the anamorphic ratio, where the ratio of picture width to picture height is 2.35 to 1, unlike US TV's 1.33 to 1. In the next 10 years, I believe that home video

is going to go to 2.35, and that we'll get the experience you would have in a theater.

There probably have been over 10,000 movies photographed in the anamorphic format. So I think it's going to be a real boon for home video—everything that's been photographed in the anamorphic format is going to have a new life. It's the same as when color television came out—every movie that was photographed in color became a premium item.

FREEDOM'S ARSENAL



J.G. BALLARD

Author
Empire of the Sun, Crash

I think the future for video is absolutely as assured as the future for the book. I look forward to the day when specialist video producers—the equivalent of Sun Records and the like in the music business of 20, 30 years ago, and the equivalent of small publishers in the book trade—really can begin to reach out to the public.

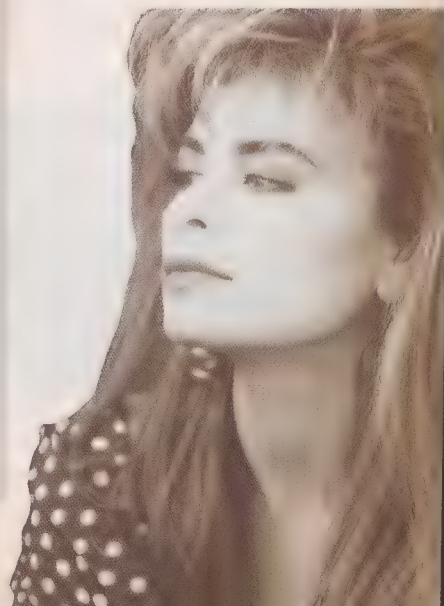
I think the VCR is a great instrument for freedom. It allows people to pursue minority hobbies and minority interests, whether it's in video movies or documentary videos. I think the VCR is a great weapon in the quest for greater freedom of information, and greater freedom for the imagination, too, for that matter.

Doug Brod, Janice Ellinghausen, Roy Hemming, Glenn Kenny, Joanna Langfield, Amy Lipton, George Mannes, Craig Modderno and Marc Shapiro contributed to this special section.

PAULA ABDUL

Singer, dancer
Forever Your Girl

The big movie musical will return to prominence in this decade, as recording artists take the video music concept one step further. They'll convince the studios to make the type of musical extravaganzas they've neglected during the past two decades.

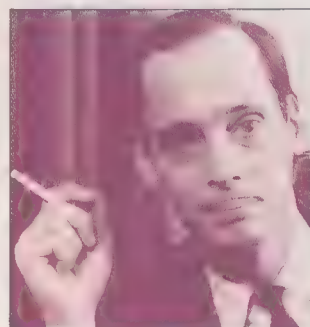




DENZEL WASHINGTON

Actor
*A Soldier's Story, Cry
Freedom, Glory*

The fact that many people see films on video as opposed to seeing them in theaters doesn't affect me as an actor at all. It doesn't have anything to do with what I do. There's no different approach to the work. But if you're interested in doing movies, video probably helps you a bit, because there is such a need for movies on video that they're making more of them, which means there'll be more work.



JOHN WATERS

Writer, director
Hairspray, Cry-Baby

The '90s will bring more of an underground society of collectors. In some ways video is the only way left you can see a movie. You'll never be able to see some in a theater or on TV, but the most obscure films ever can now be seen on video. That's where I think it will go—*Boom!*, *Susan Slade*, all those great bad melodramas.

DIGITAL BY TKO

YVES FAROUDJA

President, Faroudja
Laboratories
Designers of the Super NTSC
Advanced TV System

I believe that the present video standards are going to

remain for the next 10 years. So I think we'll see two formats: 8mm, because of the convenience of the small size—and VHS. Their quality will be improved in a step-by-step fashion. The real step up in quality will occur when a reasonably priced digital recording scheme appears on the market. Certainly this will happen in 10 years.

STEVEN SODERBERGH

Director
sex, lies, and videotape

The remarks I made about video being an "anesthetizing influence" and "passive" when promoting my movie weren't directed at home video itself so much as they were at broadcast television—shows like *Oprah*, *Donahue* and so forth. I look at home video differently in the sense that when you go to a store to rent a tape, you're making an active choice about what you want

to see. I think ultimately the pros of home video stack up higher than the cons. One con is that repertory houses have been all but killed, and it would be nice to see the movies that are out on tape on a theater screen—that opportunity is gone. On the other hand, you can see them in your home, in focus, with the sound properly adjusted, and you can see almost anything.

sex, lies, and videotape exists because of RCA/Columbia Home Video. Unequivocally, no qualifications. The fact that pre-sale to video can help a lot of different kinds of movies get made is going to be very important in the next 10 years.

WES CRAVEN

Director
*A Nightmare on Elm Street,
The Serpent and the Rainbow,
Shocker*

More people are telling me they've seen a movie of mine on video than have seen it in a

theater. I would say that home video has extended the audience for my films by at least half. A lot of my films, especially the early ones, did not get a wide theatrical release. If I had to depend on theatrical showings, nobody would have known about *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Last House on the Left* and *Swamp Thing*. With home video, second and even third generations have discovered them.



ALANNAH MYLES

Singer, "Black Velvet"

Video is going to be as essential to break a new act in the '90s as it was in the '80s. But music videos are going to become simpler, leaving a great deal to the imagination. It really depends on the concept, for it's necessary to embellish the music chosen as the single. Otherwise, what's the point?

FRANK MANCUSO JR.

Producer
Friday the 13th, Internal Affairs

In the '90s so much of the rest of the world will take place in the home environment that entertainment will become a cheap form of relief from that environment. The quality of home entertainment systems will improve, but I think that going out to movies as an escape from the home environment will be a real trend.

IMAGE TRANSFORMATION



ALLEN DAVIAU

Cinematographer
E.T., Empire of the Sun

Film continues to improve at its own pace, and spectacularly so. Film will stay the front-end recording medium for a lot longer than many people an-

ticipate. Meanwhile, through sophisticated technology in the film-to-tape transfer, we can now virtually change color and contrast from frame to frame. You're going to see more precise control of contrast, color, composition. We will have more control of specific areas of the frame. Our ability to perfect the image will get to the point where it will become the ability to alter the image totally.

Finally, Relief For Those Who Can't Find Happiness Through Regular Channels.

Now you can literally get more out of your TV. With Uniden's new line of sophisticated satellite receivers, you'll enjoy access to hundreds of channels around the world.

No matter which model you choose, Uniden gives you the latest technology com-

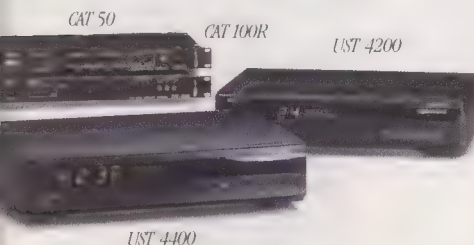
bined with unprecedented ease. Such as our top-of-the-line UST 4800 IRD featuring the exclusive built-in SuperGuide™ a complete on-screen listing of all programs that makes selection and viewing easier than ever before. And the UST 4400 and UST 4200 IRDs which offer unsurpassed performance and outstanding value.

The same high quality found in our home satellite receivers is also incorporated

into our new commercial line-up—the CAT 100R receiver and CAT 50 stereo modulator.

So if you can't find what you need through the usual channels, look into Uniden satellite receivers. *You'll find yourself face to face with a world of entertainment.*

uniden
Satellite Television



The UST 4800 was selected for the Innovations '89 Design & Engineering Exhibit.

NOTE: Vacuum fluorescent display featured on production model

RICHARD A. KRAFT

President, chief operating officer, Matsushita Electric Corp. of America

As I look at the display technology proceeding through the next 10 years, it seems the path is going to be pretty much a continued refinement of the technology that we see today. Clearly, the trend in color picture tubes is bigger, flatter and more square.

New LCD projection TV systems may allow us to provide big-screen television in compact viewing areas at competitive prices. A rear-projection monitor using this technology would not have the weight or size penalties dictated by direct-view picture tubes.

I believe that we're going to see high-definition TV introduced in this country toward the end of the '90s. And home digital VCRs could appear toward the end of this decade. Before they do, though, we'll see continued refinement and improvement of the VCRs we know today—improvements in virtually all aspects of their performance.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

LEN FELDMAN

VR technical editor

Don't look for HDTV until the late '90s at the earliest. That



doesn't mean we won't have better pictures on our video screens before then. Look for primary HDTV delivery to come via optical discs, followed by cable delivery. Over-the-air HDTV will place third.

We will see more products that merge audio and video technology, as companies begin to deliver music and other fare, such as data, via available cable TV channels. Such services will spawn a new category of specialized video/audio/data tuners and receivers that will couple to phone lines and perhaps to PCs, linking users with unlimited data delivered by satellite, fiber-optic phone lines or cable TV operators.

RICHARD RUSH

Director

The Stunt Man, Diet Coke commercial on the *Indiana Jones* and the *Last Crusade* tape

For the last 20 years, if you asked any optical house or technical facility in Hollywood, they'd tell you that the translation of video to the big screen is just around the corner. I hope to hell it really is around the corner this time. Because as soon as it is, video's going to make a tremendous inroad into motion pictures. There are great advantages to the flexibility of video as a production medium, particularly for special effects.

SHIZUO TAKANO

Executive vice president, JVC
"Father of VHS"

Digital, perpendicular-magnetic and optical recording are only a few of the many developments in video technology now underway. The next 10 years will be a period of trial and error for them, but I honestly believe none of them will replace VHS. As the LCD projector and the Super-VHS deck gain popularity, the combination promises a system that will turn every household into a genuine home video theater. It will liberate the widescreen movie from a tiny picture tube and will restore it as widescreen entertainment.

THE EMPEROR EXPOSED



JIM LEHRER

Co-anchor

MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour

The Romanian revolution was in large measure triggered by the access that people had to television feeds from countries around Romania. In Romania, they couldn't get any news, but everybody had access, either through videotape or over-the-air broadcasts from other parts of Eastern Europe. So the people in Romania knew what was going on right over their borders, and they said, "Hey, my goodness, if it happened there and those people can do it, we can do it as well."

From this point on, it's no longer possible for any tyrant to keep his or her people in the dark about what's going on in the rest of the world. And it's the video technology that has made this possible.



ROPE & DOPE

MIKE TYSON

Former world-champion, heavyweight boxing

I think many boxers in the future might study videos so they can learn about their opponents and the great boxers of the past. But I don't look at videos of my opponents because I don't think there's anything I can learn. I already know nobody can beat me!

TOMMY CHONG

Writer, director, actor
Up in Smoke, *Far Out Man*

There will be better and more X-rated movies. In fact, we'll export them in order to eliminate our trade deficit. As soon as a new baby starts to hum in the '90s, his parents will make a music video and try to sell their new singing star as the next Michael Jackson.






The Definition of Excellence. In Sight and Sound.

Introducing Proton's new big screen 31" monitor/receiver with Aphex Aural Exciter.[®]

Proton has always set the industry standard for breathtaking video performance. And our big new VT-331, 31" picture follows in that tradition. But this time, the picture isn't all we've expanded.

By incorporating the Aphex Aural Exciter circuitry, we've achieved a new level of audio clarity and transparency. So harmonics are restored, highs more natural, and vocals more vivid. And, at the touch of a button, our Expander provides vastly superior stereo imaging.

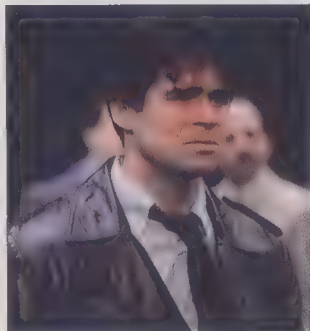
With our SD-1000 Enhanced Surround Decoder, your enjoyment will be even greater. This Aphex innovation starts where Dolby Surround[®] leaves off, creating an expanded  listening area that wraps you in pure listening pleasure.

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TREAT WILLIAMS

Actor
Prince of the City, Dead Heat

I'm excited that the video revolution has opened up a whole new "Hollywood" for new product. I see it as an opportunity for actors like myself to improve themselves and to find material that no studio would touch.

I'm a character actor and I like to work on pieces that are challenging and different. Those kinds of pieces usually go to another actor who's already got clout in Hollywood, if they go to anybody at all. Hollywood is not in the business of making films to lose money, and those films sometimes don't make money. But what made-for-video has done is given an opportunity for actors like myself to work in *film noir*, to really exercise our craft in a way we would normally be able to do only on film. Just by virtue of supply and demand, it's a different kind of Hollywood where a lot of different movies get made.

START THINKING BIG

JOHN MILIUS

Writer, director
Red Dawn, Farewell to the King, Flight of the Intruder

In the '90s, movie directors are going to have to learn how to direct instead of watching video monitors while shooting a scene.

Too many directors are framing shots based on how the scene will look on video, instead of visualizing for the big screen.

Entertainment companies will also, I hope, rely more on actual moviemakers instead of commercial directors who shoot scenes like they're minivideos.



BRAD JOHNSON

Actor
Always, Flight of the Intruder

I think more and more actors, especially newer ones, will present themselves to casting people by submitting videos of their work. New actors who haven't done many roles yet will tape themselves doing classic scenes. By doing this, they won't have to do low-budget movies just so they'll have some footage to show.



MATTHEW BRODERICK

Actor
Glory, Family Business

Video supposedly makes it easier for a lot more people to make films, so the next 10 years should add to the art of filmmaking. The more avenues the better.

LCD: ALTERED PERCEPTIONS



ROBERT GERSON

Editor
This Week in Consumer Electronics magazine

LCD technology will change projection TV as we know it, by replacing tubes with high-density active-matrix panels. We'll see front-projection LCD images up to 120 inches, and rear projection in the 40- to 70-inch range with cabinets less than 18 inches deep.

The display quality will qualify as improved-definition TV, and we'll need it because the first digital VCRs for consumers will emerge in the next 10 years. Unfortunately, digital probably will arrive in two incompatible formats. We'll have recordable video and audio discs, but the high price of the hardware and the recording medium will limit the technology to high-end buffs. Videotape will remain the mass-market format. HDTV won't be a mass market item, either—not within the next 10 years.

DOWN FOR THE COUCH

PETE HAMILL

Journalist, screenwriter
The Neon Empire

I spend less time seeing movies because I'm too busy. But I also write screenplays, and I'm able to look at a movie on video and absorb it in a way I couldn't in a theater. One of my ambitions is to be a couch potato for four days.



JOE FRANKLIN

TV host, radio personality
The Joe Franklin Show

I envision a future with less cocktail-lounge idle chatter, less devotion to meaningless activity, and much more sensible use of the time left to us after sleep and work. I know video is there, waiting for me to enjoy it, so I'm more eager



to get home when work in the office is completed.

It takes a pretty good TV to fool these experts.



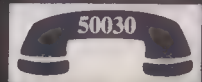
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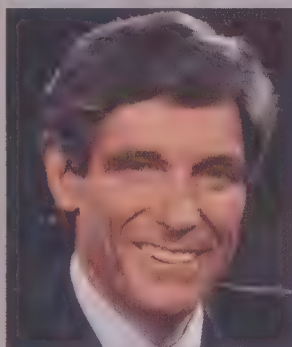
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INTERACTIVE JOURNALISM


**MAURY
POVICH**

News anchor
A Current Affair

We could not exist as *A Current Affair* now exists without home video. Home video has become and will continue to

evolve as the number-one source for information—for graphics during events like the Sioux City air crash or the San Francisco earthquake. At crime scenes now, grieving families are giving us home videos instead of pictures off their mantels.

Video is changing the whole face of TV news, and not just the long form like we do on *A Current Affair*, but the nightly newscasts. You're going to see victims of crime in home videos, and video will play a role in solving missing-kid cases, runaways and kidnappings. I think, in the big world, politicians won't be able to lie to their people anymore because video will be used to show the sins of government. Even in this country, video was used to show what happened in the Tompkins Square Park incident.


**ART
BUCHWALD**

Syndicated columnist, author
Whose Rose Garden Is It, Anyway?

I think video is going to be used more and more, for work, for pleasure, for everything. Lawyers send videos to each other now. I get a lot of them in the mail. Instead of a press release, now they send you a videotape.

I'll probably use video more in the future. It's just another very super form of entertainment. I have three or four videocameras, but I always buy the next one. I'm a good customer.

IT'S STILL VIDEO


**FRANK C.
BARR**

VR technical editor
President, Advanced
Product Evaluation Lab

Digital video recorders are certain to be available during the '90s. While we are now seeing the beginnings of still video, in the form of such analog products as Sony's Mavica and Canon's Xapshot, look for vast improvements in picture quality from digital processing and storage. With this and high-resolution video monitors, the age of the video slide show will arrive. Video printers will become economical and good enough to deliver high-resolution prints.

**RICHARD
EKSTRACT**

Founder, *Video Review*
President, Viare Publishing

For the future, video promises improvements in the quality of life beyond mere home entertainment. If true high-definition systems are allowed to develop, the technology will impact the fields of medicine, geophysical research and space exploration.

Considered in the broadest sense, video can be another tool for human advancement. I'd like to see our elected leaders apply some foresight to this issue, but their record on HDTV research so far isn't encouraging.

Government needn't foot the bill to develop HDTV—the private sector can do it more efficiently. Government's best contribution would be to remove the red tape that prevents companies from pooling their resources and expertise, and keeps us stuck with the technology of the 1940s. As citizens and video enthusiasts, we have to let our representatives know that the US should never take a back seat in technological progress.

LOW BLOWS


**JESSICA
TANDY**

Actress
Driving Miss Daisy

Video is wonderful, in its place. It's not the same as seeing a film in the theater, though, is it? It's just not the same as being part of a big group seeing it together, and I do think there is something special about that.

I find video relaxing. You can stop the tape if you don't like it. And you won't offend others by climbing over their knees to get out of the theater!


**RANDY
COHEN**

Writer
Late Night with David Letterman

With hundreds of cable channels, television will at last achieve the variety and sophistication of AM radio, as viewers watch bigger and bigger TV screens displaying smaller and smaller ideas. So I predict that by 1991 an aging Deborah Norville will be replaced by an 11-year-old who's so blond you can see through her.

**HUGH
HEFNER**

Editor in chief, *Playboy*

The consumer will be king in the '90s, and the direction of video entertainment will reflect the increasing sophistication of the marketplace. The '80s introduced viewers to home video hardware and software. The '90s will see a demand for technologically superior equipment and a much wider variety of programming. We'll see a greater emphasis on leisure-time activities and a growth in special-interest videos. In many respects, the '90s will be closer to the '60s in attitudes toward sex and sexuality, which means that consumers will be demanding more provocative programs.



Think of it as turbocharged TV.

Now high-performance can be experienced in a different kind of vehicle.

Toshiba's new 32-inch Super TUBE™ TV with Super Carver Sonic Holography.®

Beneath its sleek, sculpted body, the new Super TUBE™, the most powerful in its class, does for TV what turbocharging does for engines.

The power comes from increased voltage, via a dual path electron gun and eight large lenses.

These and other modifications ensure sharper focus and detail, 700 lines

of resolution and unsurpassed brightness and contrast.

This exhilarating picture is matched only by the world's most advanced TV sound: Super Carver® Sound. Its newly-developed Dipole Spatial Sound™ speaker creates a three-dimensional effect that actually outperforms some high-end audio equipment.

And Toshiba's 32-inch Super TUBE™ TV comes loaded with features, all standard of course, that make it incredibly responsive and easy to control.

Including remote-controlled swivel motors that allow the TV and two of its six speakers to each turn 15 degrees left or right.

Finally, there's a television for people who want high-performance in their living-room, as well as their garage.

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VIDEOSPACE 2000

By Howard J. Blumenthal

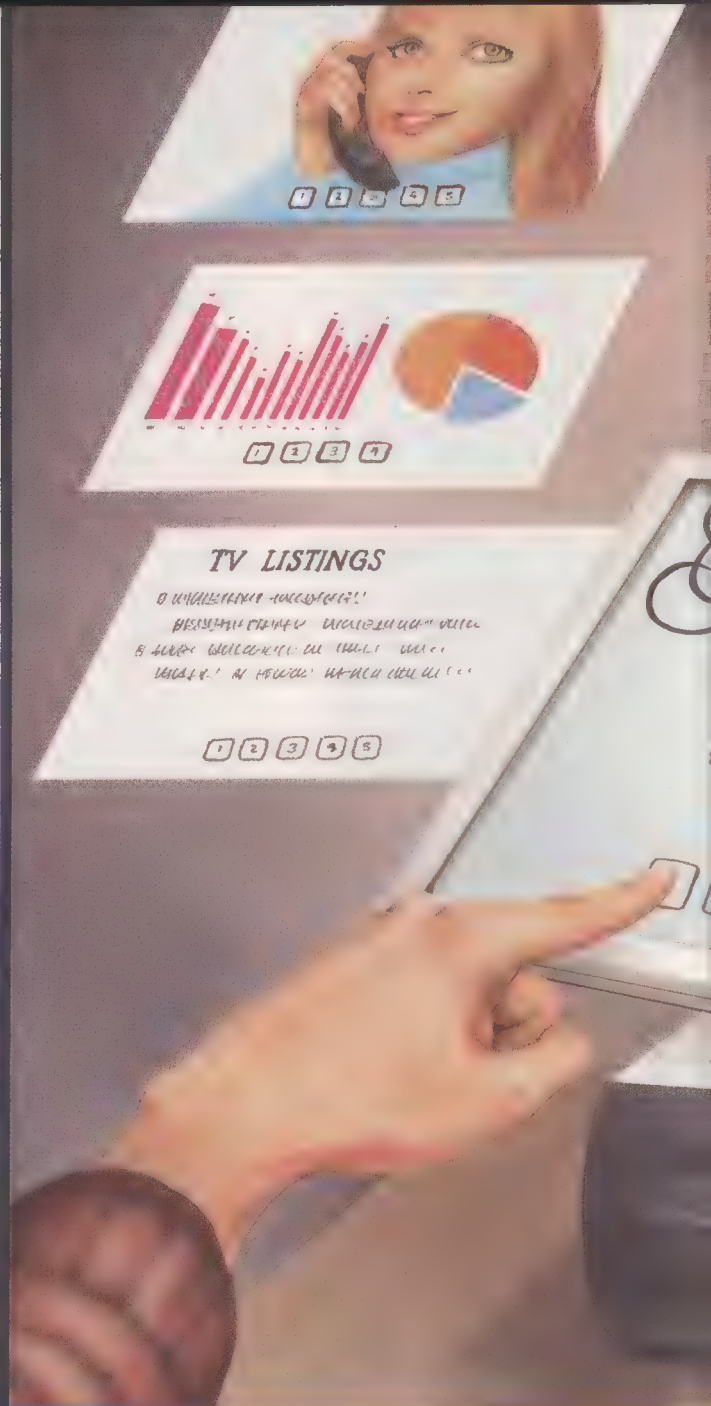
*We've traveled ahead in time
to bring you an exclusive look at
some products from the future—culled
from the 20th Anniversary Issue
of Video Review*

It's amusing to recall that television, telephones and computers once were considered separate technologies. Today's complicated lifestyles demand total integration of all communications functions, just as the futurists predicted over a decade ago.

The latest home entertainment and information center is simply designed, with all of the controls conveniently located on a single touch- or voice-sensitive panel. There are no clusters of incompatible remote controls and, better yet, no cables.

Three devices are all that the modern media room requires. The first is the control panel, a flat liquid-crystal display that combines our computer display, videophone and remote control center. The second is a record/playback device that accommodates each of the seven audio/video formats currently in use. The third is a flat screen with built-in speaker side panels. The gradual loosening of FCC regulations allows these three wonders to interact via digitally compressed signals carried on a user-selectable FM frequency.

No installation is required. Just unpack each device, place it so that you're comfortable, press the "power" button and you're ready to enjoy the latest in home entertainment. When we installed the threesome at the office, we had everything up and running in just



THE CONTROL PANEL

The heart of the system is a color LCD panel measuring 9 x 12 inches. The panel has several functions, mostly related to remote control and communications.

While it is possible to display a videophone conversation on the 40-inch screen, this is larger than most people find comfortable when talking to friends or relatives. The smaller panel is ideal for visual chats with one or two people. If three or more will converse, we suggest the larger screen.

The panel also operates as a conventional remote control. Select the device (the laser videodisc, for example), and a complete set of touch-sensitive controls will appear on the screen.





THE MEDIA ROOM

The most-used screen applications are related to data. We tried several fiber-optic cable services and IC cards, all with good results. Leonard Maltin's 30th Anniversary TV Movies & Video Guide (NAL, \$35.95) had no trouble integrating with on-screen listings; for example, *Goose with the Wind II* was scheduled on TrumpNet tonight at 8 p.m. When we called up the listing, Maltin's review filled the screen. The weather, traffic updates, even the turkey cooking in the megger oven—all this can be monitored on the small screen.

THE RECORDER/PLAYER

The Minitel GK-5324 places all of the most common recording and playback

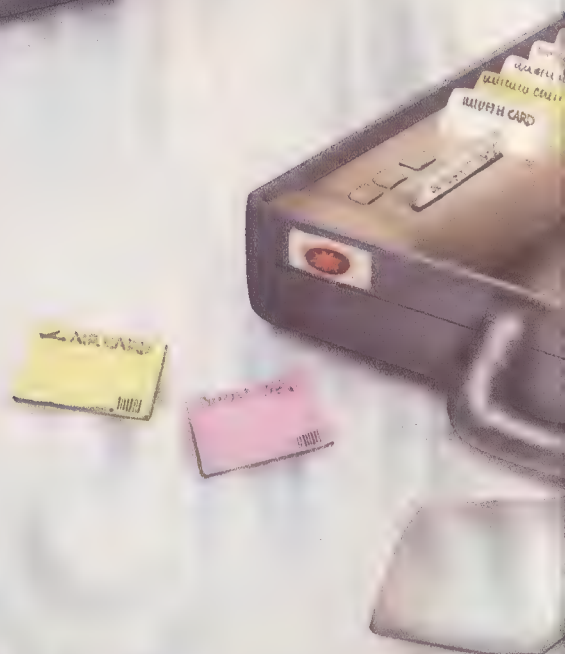
devices into one handsome console. The recorder can be used for combined audio and video, or for audio only. Although these machines are available in various configurations from many different manufacturers, we like Minitel's idea of placing four recorders in a single chassis, although the MPAA is still complaining. Making copies from DAT to Hyper-8, or from laser disc to SmartCard is as easy as touching a few buttons on the remote-control panel. A pair of S-VHS machines, each with built-in VHS-C caddy, completes this impressive and stylish piece of hardware.

In our tests, we found that the GK-5324 requires no more ventilation than machines much less fully featured.

This despite six motors and some very sensitive RISC-II microprocessors inside. Minitel's investment in aerospace-grade compressors in 1991 seems to have paid off in a cool-running, trouble-free super-conductor power supply.

THE BIG SCREEN

Active Matrix LCDs have come a long way since the late 1980s. Several billion crystal pixels create the high-resolution color picture on this 40-inch screen—and it's only two inches thick. Behind the screen, a gas-plasma surface provides illumination many footcandle brighter than the CRT monitors of the past. Four long, narrow electrostatic speakers form the display. The two side speakers



THE PORTABLE WORKSTATION

provide left and right stereo while the upper and lower drivers split the center channel for height perception. This screen can show anything that can be seen on the smaller control panel, but alas, it is not touch-sensitive. Maybe next year.

THE VIDEOSPECS

This device is so convenient and so comfortable that it's tough to imagine traveling without one. NasaVision's goggles are easily adjusted for focusing on the pair of wide-format video screens inside. The audio system offers Dolby SFX Surround, with five transducers (a front and rear pair in each earpiece, and a center-channel transducer just above the nose, between the two screens).

The specs have touch-sensitive controls. To adjust brightness, touch the front of the left eyepiece, and run your fingertip up (more) or down (less). Volume is adjusted by touching the right eyepiece.

No cables are required if you are within six feet of your case. With 256,000 channels currently in use, interference with other units should not be a factor.

THE DATA CENTER

Open the top clamshell and you'll find the computer keyboard, screen and printer. The center-trackball layout is becoming very popular—we find it more comfortable than the QWERTY standard, particularly when working in cramped airline seats. (If you prefer the older

setup, it is available as an option.) The keyboard pops up slightly when the clamshell is opened, and sneaks down when it's shut.

The touch-sensitive color LCD screen is identical to the one used for video control centers (see previous page). The big news here is the printer located *behind* the screen. Just slip a sheet of standard typewriter paper into the slot to the right of the screen, press "print" and the printed sheet comes out on the left. At 600 dots per inch, the quality is not photo-perfect, but it's certainly adequate for correspondence and graphics.

Access to visual data, from airline schedules to weather maps to family photos, is shown on this screen as well.



A single slot, which accepts both IC cards and the older two-inch diskettes, is on the left side of the screen panel.

INSIDE THE BRIEFCASE

Although designers are often tempted to use every cubic inch for electronics, Samsonite has wisely opted to leave some space for the latest issue of *Video Review* and other important materials. The calendar is the only electronic component on the top half of the case.

The front left corner shows the VideoSpecs controller. SmartCards and two-inch diskettes are the standard here. There are no consumer-priced recorders available for these formats, so if you want the software, you'll have to buy (or

rent) it. The player also contains a multi-band tuner to receive AM, FM, VHF, UHF, all world bands, all police bands and a long list of other digital and analog frequencies (a diskette is included; it can be "localized" by dialing a special phone number). The storage compartment holds a combination of 36 diskettes or cards.

The goggles fit neatly into the third compartment, and the cellular phone rests in the fourth. The control panel shows incoming phone numbers, time and dollar charges for each call in progress (and the month's bill to date) and serves as an audio-only answering machine. Be advised that this is not a videophone. If you want to make a video call, you'll have to use a phone booth

about 15 minutes—and that includes the break we took to make a videophone call.

Although broadcast HDTV is still a few years off, we've been enjoying widescreen HDTV programs on cable and on laser disc since 1996. For NTSC images, the digital enhancement first used for the '92 Olympics is superb; this SIDTV (Super IDTV) standard provides resolution that mimics HDTV, regardless of the video source.

One neat application of the latest super-conductor technology is gimmicky, but useful. The control panel floats on top of the playback device. It levitates itself on command of your voice, and sets itself to the angle that you've prescribed as most comfortable.

Several other components are not pictured here. Two additional pairs of speakers are concealed in the sides and rear corners of the room, for Dolby-SFX Surround (a ceiling subwoofer is optional). Speakers are not wired, and for these important infrared connections, we recommend that you install plasma lighting rather than incandescent in the room, to ensure that no fidelity is lost. In-wall or flat-panel speakers are best, considering the price of residential square footage these days.

Members of the Discman generation go nowhere without music and video. We decided to spotlight this particular electronic briefcase because it combines portable A/V functions with the kind of mobile workstation that even students now find essential.

This Samsonite case comes in a choice of seven colors (the usual black, white, silver, brown and the far tastier plum, peach and lemon). Its exterior looks, feels and even smells like high-grade leather, but turns out to be a mix of Hyper-Cordura and nylon that's durable, lightweight and waterproof. The entire case is powered by a flat, polyolephin-based electrolyte that slips into the base. It holds a charge for 30 days, and can be recharged by solar power, automotive or household current. The antenna for the cellular downlink is also concealed (it runs inside the top, from one lock to the other).

The double-clamshell design is especially clever. Lift the top to reveal the computer, or when the day's work is done, open the center to do some reading, make a phone call or watch a few music videos.

Several other design features are appealing as well. Note, for example, the calendar on the inside of the briefcase. This panel is removable, and serves as an appointment book (just touch the date, and an hourly breakdown appears). The storage compartments are intelligently arranged so that SmartCards don't fall out and shuffle all over the case, an experience that we've had with products from most of the other companies. The VideoSpecs and the cellular phone conform to Global Electronic Industries Association's PDS (Portable Design Standards), so their fit is snug as well. □

Private Stock

BY
GEORGE
MANNES

V/R Associate Editor



With help from their VCRs, these TV buffs are building personal museums of broadcasting for future generations to treasure

Robert Thompson (above) collects TV from the Golden Age to the New Age. Ira Gallen (right) holds on to his childhood TV memories.

Saving a copy of a television program is one of the great joys of having a VCR. Shows that are worth taping come immediately to mind: the last episode of *M*A*S*H*, or the time that a relative appeared in the studio audience of *The Price Is Right*. The VCR has made it possible for TV fans to save pieces of the medium that for so many years was characterized by its impermanence. And certain TV fans have taken full advantage of their VCRs to amass huge collections of TV. Think about it for a minute and you can fill up dozens of tapes with TV worth treasuring.

Robert Thompson has filled 2,000 tapes.

Some people, like Thompson, collect a little bit of everything. Others concentrate on music, children's shows, favorite performers or anything to do with cars. Many admit to collecting more shows than they can possibly watch.

"TV for so long has gone off instantly, upon being broadcast, up into the ether," explains Thompson, a communications professor. "And I think

there's some real satisfaction for people somehow being able to have that stuff at their command—even though it's very seldom that they actually pull it out and look at it."

Some collectors seek original film prints of old shows instead of videotapes of broadcasts. But the VCR has made TV collecting easier. With the rise of reruns on cable and the drop in blank videotape prices over the past decade, assembling an affordable TV collection has become as easy as pushing a button on your VCR.

Kent Benjamin estimates he has 2,500 hours of rock music performed on television in his videocassette collection. How much space does that take up? "More than my wife would like," he admits.

Rock and television have long been linked in Benjamin's mind. Some of his favorite shows growing up were the short-lived '60s music programs *Shindig* and *Hullabaloo*. In 1967, he saw the Who live on their first American tour; six weeks later, he saw them perform on another of his favorite shows, *The*



Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour. That, says Benjamin, cemented the relationship between music and TV in his mind.

Benjamin, a music journalist, used to concentrate on his audio collection. But about 10 years ago, he started collecting videotapes of his favorite bands instead. "Video for me has replaced record buying, mainly because I can't afford to do both," he says.

Benjamin keeps meticulous track of what is in his collection and what he wants to tape each week. He can tell you that the band REM was on TV about a dozen times in 1984, around the time their second album came out. He's got all their TV performances, including an appearance they made on a children's talk show on the Nickelodeon cable network. "That's the kind of thing you can get if you watch TV religiously," says Benjamin.

He can tell you with assurance that another of his favorite bands, the Replacements, has performed on TV three times (including once on a British show). He's got copies of all three appearances.

And when musicians Lou Reed and John Cale played together on *Late Night with David Letterman* late last year (Benjamin taped that, too) he points out that it was the first time they performed together on network TV.

Benjamin's collection has come together from various sources. Much of it he tapes himself on his two VCRs. He trades with other music collectors, including European fans whose tapes have to be converted from European TV standards. Much of his collection of shows from the '70s NBC series *Midnight Special* actually came from someone who taped them when they were rerun on Belgian television.

The quality of prerecorded tapes is good, but Benjamin finds other problems with store-bought music clips. Most home video music releases are tailored for general tastes, not for completists who want exhaustive records of a band or an event. The selection on prerecorded video is also often limited by complicated licensing problems that prevent certain performances from being released. Benjamin points to the 1985 Live Aid concert as an example. "That'll never be out on home video," he says. "If they do put it out, it'll be edited down to a single tape." Benjamin sat through it all and taped eight hours.

Many of Benjamin's treasures come from shows that one might expect to be in reruns, but only air once or twice. When Elvis Costello and the Attractions performed on NBC's *Saturday Night Live* in December 1977, they surprised the show's producers by playing their song "Radio, Radio" instead of another song they were expected to perform. Every time that show is repeated, says Benjamin, "Radio, Radio" has been cut out. But he has a tape of the original performance—courtesy of a friend who owned "one of those incredibly expensive, your-daddy-had-to-be-rich Beta I players."

He's also got a tape of Elvis Presley's 1977 concert taped two weeks before he died, which aired about a month after his death. Benjamin saw a few minutes of it in the *This Is Elvis* documentary, but he doubts the full performance will ever appear on video. "It's kind of painful to watch," he says.

Like other people, Ira Gallen is trying to recapture his childhood. Unlike other people, he wants it complete with the commercials.

Gallen, who runs a small video production company in New York City, is an obsessive collector of early television, especially programs and commercials aimed at kids. He proudly tells the story of how he found his first perfect copy of an old *Rootie Kazootie* show in a Manhattan warehouse. He laments the way companies throw away old, classic commercials for their products—the marketers of Chiquita Bananas, for example. He steeps himself not only in the commercials of his youth, but also the products they hawked—his apartment is jammed with memorabilia such as a Tom Corbett, Space Cadet lunchbox and a Mr. Magoo-shaped soap bottle.

What distinguishes Gallen is not only his love of television from his childhood, but also his love of show and tell. Over the past eight years, Gallen has become a fixture on cable television in Manhattan with his show *Biograph Days, Biograph Nights*. The bulk of the show is made up of material out of his collection: old commercials and old program clips, sometimes even people's old home movies. "You can't take it to the grave," Gallen says, referring to his collection—which includes, by his estimate, about 10,000 commercials. "I enjoy showing it off."

Gallen also shows off his collection in other formats. He has a mail-order business selling VHS copies of his treasures from the '50s and '60s. He's got compilations, for example, of Duncan yo-yo commercials and doll commercials. On another tape he's got an hour of Ovaltine commercials featuring Captain Midnight's Secret Squadron.

Gallen's particular interest in kids' TV strikes a responsive chord in other folks as well. "As corny and as uncomplicated as it sounds," he says, "before people die, they just want to see a clip of something they remember as kids. I get tons of requests from people asking for certain things from their past that they remember."

Unlike Kent Benjamin's, much of Gallen's collection is on film. In the early days of television, before the widespread use of videotape, if a show wasn't live, it was on film. If a show was live, the only record of it was a kinescope—a film of the show as it appeared on a TV screen. Gallen is part of a network of collectors who seek film copies of TV shows rather than off-the-air videotapes when they are rerun, if they ever are. A lot of this material, Gallen explains,

has survived only because it was retrieved from TV station dumpsters or taken home by employees. "The reason that a lot of TV history and film history exists today is because of the private film collectors," Gallen says. "There are rare titles that, if it wasn't for some collector that held on to them when the networks or the studios threw them out, wouldn't be around today."

Much of early television is in the public domain—it can be bought, sold or shown by anyone because the copyrights have lapsed. But because significant parts of early TV aren't in the public domain, and because many collectors can't guarantee that their prized footage isn't stolen property, most collectors of early TV aren't as willing as Gallen is to show off their collections publicly. Gallen attempts to get permission to distribute copies of companies' commercials



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that aren't in the public domain, and to work with companies to see if he can salvage anything from their archives. For example, he acquired his collection of Captain Midnight Ovaltine commercials from Sandoz Nutrition.

It bothers Gallen that so few toy commercials from the '50s and '60s have been saved by the companies responsible for them. Hasbro has nothing, he says, Coleco has nothing, Milton Bradley, very little. Over the years, archives have been lost or thrown away. So, in addition to building his collection from advertisers, Gallen goes to other collectors who buy, sell and trade old TV treasures. He tries to make contact with anyone who has caches of old films. He picked up a bunch of old commercials, for example, from a man who directed them for Nabisco and Bosco.

Some of Gallen's treasures from the world of children's shows include copies of episodes from such '50s series as *Rocky Jones*, *Space Ranger*, *Super Circus* and *The Buccaneers*.

Does Gallen save what's on the air today? No, because he's too caught up in the past. "I think the whole history of what's being done now is going to be lost 20 years from now," he says, "because there's no record of it. I've been wanting to do it. I don't know where to put it."

Gallen's outlook for the preservation of current television may be unduly pessimistic—because of collectors like Robert Thompson. In 1980, Robert Thompson was teaching classes in television history and criticism at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. But he had a problem finding his research and instructional materials. "You need a book, you go to the library," he explains. "You need a film, you go to the video store. Where do you go when you need an episode of *Charlie's Angels*? There simply is no outlet for it unless you collect it yourself."

Ten years and 2,000 videocassettes later, Thompson has assembled his own reference library of TV shows that have been on the air since 1980—covering primetime, Saturday morning kids' shows, game shows and other daytime series. And he's taken advantage of reruns and collectors to get copies he needs of shows that aired before he started taping. From *Mr. Ed* to *Hill Street Blues*, from *The \$64,000 Question* to *The \$1.98 Beauty Contest*, he's got the history of television at his fingertips. That way, when he makes his students write critical essays about *The Brady Bunch*, they don't have to go searching for reference materials.

Institutions that store TV programming and make it available to the public are limited, says Thompson, who's now a professor of communication studies at the State University of New York in Cortland. "If you live in Chicago you've got the Museum of Broadcast Communications," he says. "If you live in New York, you've got the Museum of Broadcasting. LA has UCLA and Washington has the Library of Congress. So there are some good, solid archives of this stuff. But there certainly aren't that many of them. And I think that with television—by far the most popular dramatic art form that's ever been invented—there's something appropriate about the fact that it's the people themselves who have to act as a museum for these things."

For his personal collection, Thompson starts out by saving representative episodes of shows that have been on the air. Beyond that, guided by his research interests, he tapes certain shows exhaustively. His book on the work of producer Stephen J. Cannell is due out in July. "I have this incredible complete collection of *The A Team*, *The Greatest American Hero*, *The Rockford Files* and *Riptide* and all the other shows that he did," Thompson says. He also has complete collections of *St. Elsewhere*, *Hill Street Blues* and *Moonlighting*—shows that Thompson says are going to become important in the history of television.

But not all of his collecting, he admits, is rational. For reasons he really can't explain, he has 13 episodes of *Manimal*, the short-lived 1983 series about a scientist who could transform himself into an animal at will. "There's something where you see a little more of the collector rather than the academic," Thompson says. "There were 13 episodes of that, I think, and

Continued on page 112

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

10 Tips on Tape Preservation

No one can tell exactly how long your videocassettes will last. But if you want to preserve whatever you buy or record for as long as possible, be aware of these 10 factors that affect tape life:

• **Accidental Recording:** If you want to save a tape's contents, pop the protection tab on the cassette. It's almost too simple to worry about, until it's too late.

• **Climate:** Heat and humidity affect the lives of videotapes. The lower the temperature and relative humidity of your storage area, the better; but balance optimum conditions with realistic ones, keeping in mind that a storage environment equivalent to your playback environment is ideal. The temperature should be lower than 70° and above freezing. Relative humidity should be a maximum of 50%. Ampex recommends a temperature below 65° and relative humidity between 20% and 40%. Protect tapes from temperature variations.

• **Playing:** The number-one cause of tape damage is a faulty VCR, according to John Lynch of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. In addition, a misaligned tape on a recording VCR will create a recording that will look bad on another VCR.

• **Storage container:** Use plastic boxes to keep dust off the tape. Cardboard sleeves can shed debris that may harm tapes.

• **Recording speed:** Use the standard play (SP) mode. It takes a great deal of technology to squeeze two hours of video onto a T-120 tape. Give yourself a little leeway in playback by not squeezing on six hours.

• **Rewinding:** Before recording on a brand-new tape, fast-forward and rewind the tape to get rid of stresses in the tape that may have developed in shipping. To prevent tensions in a tape from distorting the tape in storage, play the tape all the way through, non-stop, from beginning to end, and then store it without rewinding. However, admits Del Eilers of tape manufacturer 3M, this approach is not always practical for the home user. At the Library of Congress, used tapes are fast-forwarded to the end, then rewound all the way; unfortunately, the faster that tapes are wound, the more likely that the machine will introduce erratic tensions in the tape.

• **Arrangement:** Although it's an issue with larger-reel professional tapes, it's not important whether you store your VHS tapes vertically or horizontally. However, don't store your tapes flat with the tape window facing downward: This causes the tape hubs to push against the metal springs in the cassette.

• **Magnetism:** It's "an old wives' tale," according to Jim Wheeler of Ampex, that the magnetic field from a TV set or a vacuum-cleaner motor will endanger your tape. Videocassettes are safe even three inches away from a professional tape eraser. It's inadvisable, though, to post notes to your tapes with a refrigerator magnet.

• **Usage:** One advantage of having a collection that you watch a lot, says Vanderbilt's Lynch, is that if a part of your collection is deteriorating, you'll find out before it's too late. Then you can save material by dubbing it onto a new tape.

• **Water:** If a tape has been exposed to a moist environment—in fact, even if it has been dunked in water—it can be salvaged by placing it in a dry environment for several days. Avoid storing tapes in places that may be subject to flooding.

—G.M.



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RENTAL TAPES



Opening the door on more than baseball: Costner and Jones in "the best movie of the 1980s."

FIELD OF DREAMS ★★★★★

Kevin Costner, Amy Madigan, James Earl Jones, Burt Lancaster. Directed by Phil Alden Robinson. 1989. Rated PG. (MCA tape, 106 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, no list price, March 8)

BY JEFFREY LYONS

To dismiss *Field of Dreams*, for my money the best movie of the 1980s, as simply a "baseball movie" is to miss its point entirely. For this lush, emotional, enchanting fable is really about that oft-used and much-abused phrase: the Meaning of Life. And after watching it again on video, life has indeed taken on new meaning for me—leaving a special glow about it. *Field of Dreams* makes you wonder about our existence, and simultaneously reaffirms it.

Costner, in his most sensitive work to date, plays an Iowa farmer who hears a mysterious voice in his cornfield telling him to plow under part of his acreage and build a baseball diamond, lights and all. He does—to the bewilderment of everyone. Then the ghost of "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, arguably the greatest hitter ever to pick up a bat, comes back from among the remaining cornstalks to play some flies up and take some batting practice with an astonished Costner.

Other voices then tell Costner to seek out a reclusive '60s novelist who inspired a whole generation to question authority, and simply take him to a game at Boston's

Fenway Park. As the voice says, it's "to ease his pain." Jones (who once insisted to me that "baseball is, of course, Zen") plays the J.D. Salinger-like character to the hilt. A strange friendship is forged as together they seek out a former N.Y. Giants outfielder who played only half of one inning of one game and then retired to become a small-town doctor.

If all this sounds like just so much movie hokum, you're still missing the point. Baseball is used as a metaphor for the in-

evitable passing of the generations, especially from father to son. It is the one constant in an ever-changing world. (Though, to avoid the risk of getting overly sentimental, the story wisely gives Costner and his wife, Madigan, a daughter, not a son.)

Adapted from W.P. Kinsella's novel by director Robinson, *Field of Dreams* is essentially about father-son relationships and those special moments in life we all too often let slip by. Lancaster, as the old ballplayer "Moonlight" Graham, who played so briefly in the sun and longs for one swing against a big-league pitcher (there really was such a player, I looked it up) is poignant with the weight of the world on his shoulders, yet ultimately content at the pitches life has tossed him.

But I'd be missing the point, too, if I neglected to add what the movie says about baseball itself. As Jones puts it: "Baseball reminds me of all that's good." Later we hear the rhetorical question asked by one of the ghostly ballplayers as he looks around the serenity of the diamond in the middle of the cornfield and asks: "Is this heaven?" If it is, it's a place where they keep showing *Field of Dreams* 24 hours a day.

COSTNER'S FIELD GOAL

With just a handful of movies, Kevin Costner has risen quickly to his present status as one of the most popular of Hollywood's leading men. Craig Moddermo talked with Costner for *VR* in Los Angeles.

VR: After making *Bull Durham*, did you initially get a lot of warnings about making another baseball-themed movie?

COSTNER: [Laughs] That's a polite way of putting it. Most people I trusted thought I was as nuts as my character to make this movie. But they hadn't read the script. Then I started telling people what the story was about—and they really began to think I was crazy! When I first read *Field of Dreams*, I thought it could be my generation's *It's a Wonderful Life*.

VR: Did you worry the public might dismiss *Field of Dreams* as just another baseball movie?

COSTNER: I've said this to boredom, but all I'm looking for is a good story to believe in. *Bull Durham* is about men and women and why they can't get along. *Field of Dreams* is about things gone unsaid in your life. Neither one is "a baseball movie."

VR: Are you going to do a *Silverado* sequel?

COSTNER: Nobody's even asked me to be in it, and I loved the first one. I may be the only guy in film history who didn't die in the first film and yet wasn't asked back for the sequel. Nobody's ever asked me to consider a sequel to any of my movies!

VR: Your next movie *Dances with Wolves* is a \$22 million western in which you star and make your directorial debut. But it was initially turned down by all the major studios despite your hit boxoffice record. Did that hurt?

COSTNER: Somewhat. But I had to remember it's still a business, not a showcase for your art. I realize the risk people take with a first-time director.

VR: Can you name a recent movie that you would have liked to have starred in?

COSTNER: *Revolution* [the Hugh Hudson-directed, Al Pacino-toplined boxoffice bomb]. I'm glad I didn't do it because it didn't turn out to be a very good movie. But I'd like to put on buckskins and a ponytail and go underwater with a reed, hiding from the Indians. I'd love to be pushing off a birchbark canoe in a forest. To me that's sexy!

Jeffrey Lyons is co-host of TV's *Sneak Previews Goes Video* and a critic for USA Tonight and CBS Radio.



De Palma's meaningful widescreen images—a *Casualty of video?*

CASUALTIES OF WAR ★★

Michael J. Fox, Sean Penn, Thuy Thy Le, Don Harvey. Directed by Brian De Palma. 1989. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia tape, 120 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95, available March 21) □

BY ANDREW SARRIS

De Palma's *Casualties of War* had more critical cachet in some quarters than success with the general public during its theatrical release. Consequently, there is a big, still untapped audience for the video release. For some reason, fans of Fox's comedic roles on the *Family Ties* TV sitcom and *Back to the Future* movie fantasies did not flock to *Casualties of War*, in which he "stretches" his talents on a grim, grisly subject: The rape and murder of a Vietnamese woman by American GIs and the subsequent efforts to cover up the crime. (Tom Cruise has had more success in switching type in both *Rain Man* and *Born on the Fourth of July*.)

For my own part, I found David Rabe's adaptation of Daniel Lang's 1969 *New Yorker* magazine pieces much too obvious as a morality tale. Penn gives a little shading to his role of the instigator and chief architect of the wartime atrocity, but Fox is unbelievably goody-goody as the guy who blows the whistle. No opportunity is lost, no anguished close-up is spared to show that the Fox character is just a little lamb lost among a pack of wolves.

Nonetheless, there is no denying that De Palma has staged the action scenes (shot in Thailand) with power and panache. Unfortunately, much of his artistic achievement is lost in the transition from the big, wide theater screen to the squared-off, panned-and-scanned videocassette version. Oddly, the tape edition is letterboxed for the opening credits and then non-letterboxed the rest of the way. This is particularly damaging because so much of the footage was shot outdoors with the various characters spread out as they

would be, realistically, in a battle zone. Hence, there are occasions when Fox is squashed on one side of the arbitrary video frame, while Penn is only partially visible on the other side, with a minor character plunk in the middle. The sweep of the spectacle is so completely lost that the movie is reduced in scope to a personal quarrel between the Fox saint and the Penn sinner.

For anyone who has not seen *Casualties of War*, I suppose the videocassette edition is better than nothing, but barely. The viewer will not really "see" what De Palma intended; certainly not all of it. For people with even the most rudimentary awareness of the visual forms and rhythms of cinema, this video version of *Casualties* will be an occasion for the gnashing of teeth. De Palma may not have Steven Spielberg's clout in the industry, but he should urge the studio to follow in Spielberg's footsteps by turning out both letterboxed and non-letterboxed versions. In that event, I could give an extra star or two to the letterboxed edition—particularly since Thuy Thy Le, as the violated Vietnamese woman, is memorably affecting in her dignified vulnerability.

THE ABYSS ★★★

Ed Harris, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Michael Biehn. Directed by James Cameron. 1989. Rated PG-13. (CBS/Fox tape, 129 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98, available March 29)

BY CLIVE BARNES

The trouble with *The Abyss*—and let's for once start with the trouble—is that it is not quite as good a romantic sci-fi/adventure/psycho-thriller (a description that might have appealed to Shakespeare's Polonius) as it could have been. And the reason is clear, for the story is very muddy. But this is still an exciting, fascinating movie.

It starts right off without credits—sensibly, but disconcertingly, these are all left to the end—and, from there on, the viewer is likely to be struggling to discover exactly what is happening, and some-

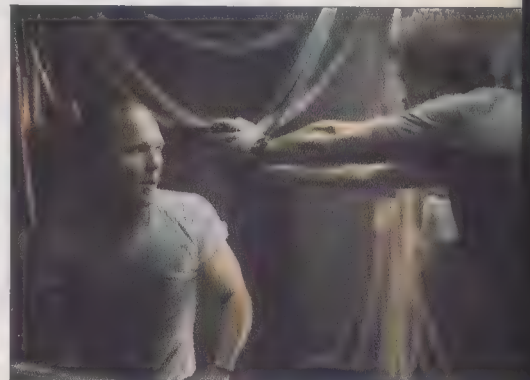
times even *where* it is happening. Complex it is. But also remarkable.

James (*The Terminator*) Cameron has written and directed this odd fantasy of an encounter of another kind. At times it seems a peculiar, and at other times an engaging cross between Kubrick's *2001* and Spielberg's *E.T.* Add in underwater tensions and explosions from *Das Boot*. On the whole, this is a movie that has more precedents than prescience—or sense.

The time, it seems, is now—or, in the light of *glasnost*, perhaps a little earlier. A nuclear submarine has been mysteriously knocked out several thousand feet below the surface. Foreman Harris and his underwater oil-drilling team are asked by the US Navy to investigate. Along for the ride is the engineer (Mastrantonio) who designed the complicated underwater live-in oil rig; she's married to Harris, although on the brink of divorce.

As they explore the strange underwater happenings, the realization comes—first to Mastrantonio—that they are in the presence of unearthly beings. The tip-off: the ocean floor is suffused with pink light and there's a heavenly choir on the soundtrack. However, not everyone recognizes "them" as friendly extra-oceanics. (After all, they have already killed off an atomic sub.) One of the investigators, a tough Naval neurotic on the verge of psychological collapse (Biehn), smells a Red plot and wants to use a few atomic warheads to resolve things.

In the midst of all the alarms, escapes, excursions and underwater chaos, Harris



Harris, Biehn: encounter of another kind.

and Mastrantonio—tough cookies both, but equally capable of tears—fall back in love. The performances of the two stars, like that of Biehn (that Cameron regular from *The Terminator* and *Aliens*), are most effective, and the non-stop action is terrific even when puzzling. There's great photography from Mikael Salomon, suspenseful editing from Joel Goodman and a nicely eerie score from Alan Silvestri.

Clive Barnes is a critic for the *New York Post* and former critic for both the *London Times* and *New York Times*.

Andrew Sarris is the movie critic of the *New York Observer* and the author of *The American Cinema*, *Cinema and Politics* and other books.

QUEEN OF HEARTS ★★★★★

Ian Hawkes, Anita Zagaria, Joseph Long, Eileen Way, Vittorio Duse. Directed by Jon Amiel. 1989. Rated PG. (MCEG/Virgin tape, 112 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95, available March 6)

BY JOHN R. QUAIN

Queen of Hearts is the latest movie in the told-from-a-child's-point-of-view genre that includes such successes as *My Life as a Dog* and *Au Revoir les Enfants*. What distinguishes this British entry from the others is its delightfully flamboyant direction and its almost acrobatic balance of comedy, romance and pathos. The narrator is a young boy whose family recollections are told in almost hallucinatory sequences that never fail to surprise as well as entertain.

The child's tale begins in a small Italian town where his parents were young lovers. In order to escape an arranged marriage and an oafish groom, the couple emigrate to the UK, chased by the bride's intractable mother and the vengeful jilted groom. The ensuing rags-to-restaurateur story combines the real-life trials of struggling immigrants with the fantastic tribulations of family legend—including a talking pig who offers financial advice. The result is a rich antipasto of gambling imagery, Biblical allusions, old-world Italian charm and entrepreneurial English impudence.

Director Amiel (TV's *The Singing Detective*) is known as a skilled creator of the fantastic. In this movie he brings his talents to bear on visualizing the romantic memories of the young narrator by using inventive point-of-view camerawork and dreamlike fantasy sequences. His work, combined with the cast's convincing but never overplayed performances and the excellent film-to-video transfer, make *Queen of Hearts* an enthralling movie.

THE MUSIC TEACHER ★★

Jose Van Dam, Anne Roussel, Philippe Volter, Patrick Bauchau. Directed by Gerard Corbiau. 1989. Rated PG. (Orion tape, 100 min., Hi-Fi stereo, in French with English subtitles, \$79.98, available March 29)

BY ROBERT DIMATTEO

Belgian director Corbiau's feature debut comes to us with some heavily hypeable credentials: music by Mahler, Mozart, Verdi and Puccini; elegant European settings; Grammy award-winning operatic bass Jose Van Dam in the leading role; and behind-the-scenes backbiting among the classical music set.

Though the movie was taken seriously

Robert DiMatteo is a critic and columnist for United Features Syndicate.

ABOUT THESE REVIEWS

To parallel the viewing environment of most home viewers, VR critics normally review programs in their homes. Unless otherwise indicated: All tapes are SP; all LV discs are EP. All programs are in color unless marked B&W. □ indicates closed captions for the hearing-impaired; DS indicates Dolby Surround sound. Most rental tapes are available for purchase, and Collectibles can also be rented in some stores.

- ★★★★★ OUTSTANDING
- ★★★★ GOOD
- ★★★ AVERAGE
- ★ BELOW AVERAGE

by some foreign-film buffs at the time of its theatrical release (even copping a 1989 Academy Award nomination), it is strictly kitsch—but very refined and polished kitsch. It also reinforces old stereotypes about classical musicians as obsessive, perfectionistic prigs—a view that this conservatory-trained reviewer can attest has lingered to the present day.

Van Dam, who starred in Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni*, plays an imperious, ailing opera great who, at the height of his career in the days just before WWI, announces that he will never perform again. He retires to a country estate to devote himself to one special student (Roussel), but becomes intrigued by a young hoodlum (Volter) who turns out to have a voice of great potential. A poisonous prince (Bauchau) with a secret grudge against Van Dam invites the two proteges to participate in a vocal competition, and the stage is set for the clash of titanic egos.

The movie has its lush appeal, well-rendered on the video screen with very readable yellow subtitles. For music lovers, the soundtrack is superb—even though it's obvious that Roussel isn't singing her

Masking The Music Teacher's catfights.



numbers. Overall, however, the movie is too precious and melodramatic, with the battle of wills between prince and teacher coming off as the male equivalent of all those catfights between Krystle and Alexis on *Dynasty*. There's a surfeit of haughtily raised eyebrows, pursed lips, quivering uvulas and villainous hand-wringing. *The Music Teacher* lacks the depth and balance of *Basileus Quartet*, a comparable picture about self-sacrificing classical musicians.

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA ★★

Robert Englund, Jill Schoelen, Alex Hyde-White. Directed by Dwight H. Little. 1989. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia tape, 93 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95, available March 7) □

BY ED HULSE

If you think that producer Harry Alan Towers rushed this movie into release to cash in on publicity generated by the recent Broadway musical hit written by Andrew Lloyd Webber—well, you're right. But this *Phantom* isn't just a cheap knockoff. It's economically but carefully made, with scrupulous attention to period detail. Unfortunately, it's marred by an excessive (and unnecessary) reliance on blood and gore, presumably Towers' concession to today's horror-movie market.

Although this *Phantom* has been burdened with a moronic, predictable framing device, the original plotline remains intact. Englund, the erstwhile Freddy Krueger from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, plays the horribly disfigured musical genius whose love for a young opera singer (Schoelen) prompts him to tutor the girl—from afar, initially—and pave the way for her successful debut.

Englund displays a surprising flair for *Phantom's* red-blooded melodrama. He delivers florid dialogue with relish, and cuts a sinister figure in slouch hat and long black cape (even though the costume gives him an uncanny resemblance to the old pulp-magazine hero, the Shadow). Schoelen, however, isn't up to the demands of her role, though she tries hard. Her plucky, tomboyish demeanor is much better suited to contemporary characters, and her husky voice never impresses as having the power to fill an opera house.

Aside from the gore and the witless, footage-wasting framing story, this version of *Phantom* offers a fair amount of entertainment. It's actually reminiscent of the Hammer horror movies of the late '60s (some of which were produced by Towers), which is definitely in its favor.

Ed Hulse is the editor of Previews magazine and former host of TV's Movie Mania.

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WR: MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM ★★★

Milena Dravic, Jagoda Kaloper, Tuli Kupferberg, Jackie Curtis. Directed by Dusan Makavejev. 1971. Not rated. (Facets tape, 84 min., Hi-Fi mono, in English and Serbian with English subtitles, \$79.95, now available)

BY GLENN KENNY

Released in the US at the twilight of the '60s counterculture, *WR* impressed many reviewers of that time as a confusing and arty variant of the "blue movies" that were then beginning to creep out of the underground. Seen today, this daring work is fascinating not just for its time-capsule value (which is substantial) but also for its provocative philosophical and political observations.

Yugoslavian director Makavejev assembled this work out of documentary footage he shot while in New York on a Ford Foundation grant during the late '60s, plus a made-in-Yugoslavia satire on sexual liberation in the Soviet bloc, and an obscure movie from '40s Russia that canonizes Stalin.

Historians of the counterculture will eat up the New York sequences, which depict a sexual "scene" that was unimaginable in the years before or since and provide revealing glimpses of some notable artistic eccentrics of that era, including musician/agitator Kupferberg and former Warhol star Curtis. There are also soundbites from Wilhelm Reich, one of Freud's early assistants who fled to America to escape Nazi persecution and whose radical theories subsequently got him in trouble with the US government. His initials—and the words "World Revolution"—give the movie part of its title.

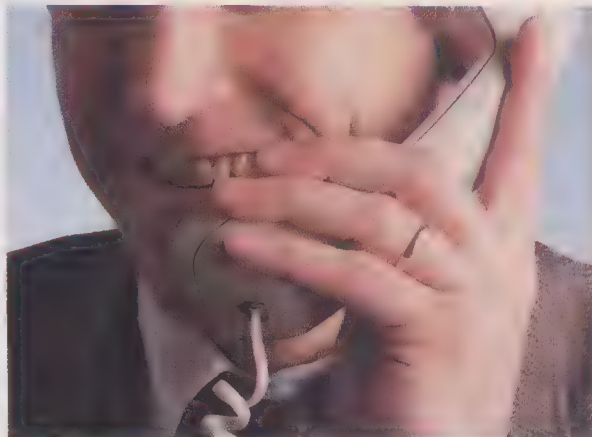
Difficult to describe and impossible to synopsise, *WR* simultaneously challenges and embraces the viewer. As Makavejev himself puts it on the cassette jacket: "If you watch for more than five minutes you become my accomplice." Makavejev sees a clear correlation between the personal and the political, or, more specifically, the sexual and the political. As he alternates between the US and Yugoslavia, presenting scenarios not at all analogous, he seems to draw lines connecting them anyway.

The movie does not present a traditionally coherent statement as such, and some may find this lack maddening. But the movie will engage those with the patience to let it. And considering the incredible upheavals transfiguring Eastern Europe today and the air of growing sexual repression here, I'd like to see Makavejev go for a sequel.

Glenn Kenny has written for the Village Voice, Spin and Musician.

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


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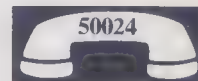
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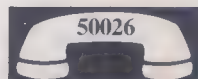
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ROMERO ★★

Raul Julia, Richard Jordan, Ana Alicia, Harold Gould. Directed by John Duigan. 1989. Rated PG-13. (Vidmark tape, 105 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95, available March 7)

BY ANDREW SARRIS

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was assassinated by a right-wing death-squad gunman in 1980. A decade later, this movie consecrates his martyrdom, as the killing of priests and nuns and other champions of the poor and the oppressed continues in Central America.

Archbishop Romero is depicted here as a man in the middle, a moderate voice calling for an end to violence from both the left and the right. But most of the violence we see on the screen comes from the right. One does not have to be either a defender or an opponent of the Reagan-Bush interventions in Central America to sense that only one side of the story is being told here—and without any shading of irony, complexity, humor or conflicting emotions. The poor are good and sweet and pure. The rich are smug and selfish and uncaring as they hire thugs to do all their dirty work. All in all, *Romero* makes *Rambo* look like Chekhov.

Australian director Duigan has given this essentially agitprop material an elegantly glossy finish so that El Salvador (reproduced on locations in Mexico) looks like it would be a verdant paradise if only the rich would share some of their luxuries with the poor. Oliver Stone's more appropriately messy *mise en scene* for *Salvador* a few years back was at least expressionistically consistent in depicting the embattled country as a hell on earth.

Still, *Romero* has received many critical raves and several prizes from religious groups for its forthright preaching of the social gospel. In some of the arguments propounded by *Romero*'s cardboard characters, Liberation theology makes common cause with Marxist theory. Yet today, Marxism stands discredited and in disarray in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Admittedly, the situation is far more complex in both Eastern Europe and Central America than the daily headlines would encourage us to believe. And *Romero* is clearly a labor of love for its participants, and I respect its sincerity. I simply question its lack of political sophistication and its cinematic value. Its sounds and images are well rendered in the videocassette version, but all in all, *Romero* is a cassette for the converted.



Serious as Einstein: soap and violins.

YOUNG EINSTEIN ★★

Yahoo Serious, Odile Le Clezio. Directed by Serious. 1989. Rated PG. (Warner tape, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95, now available)

BY ROBERT CHRISTGAU AND CAROLA DIBBELL

Only in Australia or some similar well-heeled backwater could an unknown art student write, direct, edit and star in a wacko comedy that took place anywhere but in his own head. So for Yahoo Serious' *Young Einstein* to have reached production (and then gotten worldwide distribution) amounts to a triumph of bootstrap capitalism. What's more, the movie's premise is pretty funny: Einstein is not only the son of a Tasmanian apple farmer but invents surfing and rock 'n' roll while trying to sell Sydney on the secret of putting bubbles into beer—namely E=MC².

All Serious had to do with his funny idea was make a funny movie out of it. But he didn't—at least not in terms that a resident of the Northern Hemisphere can relate to. Down Under, the premise alone is worth more, and the skimpy guffaw material is padded by Australian in-jokes that few of us Up Over can follow. Thus, the second biggest Australian-made hit in that nation's boxoffice history stiffed stateside. For us, it was *Monty Python* without that mean edge—or a *Saturday Night Live* skit stretched out way too long.

Yes, there are mitigating factors. Serious is charming—one might almost say amusing—in the lead role. Le Clezio is earnest and peppery as Einstein's grand amour Marie Curie. The crowd-scene extras take their work seriously. The cinematography is uncommonly rich for a one-man project, with period texture palpable throughout. And when the ladies of the night at Einstein's hotel try to puzzle out why Newton's theory doesn't account for Galileo's law, we laughed out loud. But that was just about the only time.

Robert Christgau is a critic for the Village Voice and author of Christgau's Record Guide. Carola Dibbell also writes for the Village Voice.

RAUL'S RIGHTEOUS ROMERO

Raul Julia is one of the few Hispanic Americans to achieve stardom on both the stage and screen—in a wide variety of classical and contemporary works, from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Taming of the Shrew* to *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Morning After*, *Tequila Sunrise*, *Tango Argentina* and *The Three Penny Opera*. The Puerto Rico-born Julia feels strongly that his role as the Salvadoran archbishop in *Romero* is one of the most important he has ever tackled. VR's Roy Hemming talked with him about it in New York.

VR: I understand you were especially eager to make *Romero*.

JULIA: Yes, it's the kind of complicated, challenging role that doesn't come very often.

Julia: another kind of killing fields?



VR: In what ways complicated or challenging?


JULIA: The character develops within the story, and that's always interesting for an actor when the role is not the same throughout but changes and grows. I was also attracted by the subject matter, which I feel is important for people in this country to find out what's happening there [in El Salvador]. After all, the killing still goes on. Soon after the movie opened last fall, there were more priests killed. So it's important to look at the whole subject right now. I know most people go to the movies for just superficial entertainment, but I think we must see these serious things too.

VR: How do you reply to those critics who say that although there has been lots of violence from both the right and left in El Salvador, the movie concentrates on right-wing violence?

JULIA: No, there's also the sequence of the leftists' kidnapping and killing of an innocent man, and Romero's efforts on his behalf. But "equal time" isn't the issue. The truth is that most of the violence has come from the right.

VR: At the end of the movie, there are a lot of photos of the victims of Salvadoran violence. Are those genuine photos of real victims?

JULIA: Oh, yes, they are all authentic—just as all of the major scenes in the movie can be factually documented. I also spent a lot of time listening to Archbishop Romero's diaries, which he had put on audiocassettes, and I watched videotapes of him. I hope this picture will help wake up people to what's happening in Central America. My wish is that people will rent the video and invite others in to watch it with them—and talk about it.



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Old pro Reynolds Breaking In young weirdo Siemaszko.

BREAKING IN ★★

Burt Reynolds, Casey Siemaszko, Sheila Kelley. Directed by Bill Forsyth. 1989. Rated R. (HBO tape, 94 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95, available Feb. 21)

BY NEAL GABLER

Bill Forsyth, the eccentric Scottish director, has managed to build a small cult by fashioning movies that are oblique, odd, giddy, wistful and wonderful. His pictures, as a rule, don't have plots. They're doodles—little observations of life that are amusing at worst and strangely evocative at best, as in his masterpiece *Local Hero*. Admirers smile when they think of a Forsyth picture. He's had that kind of gift.

But one may wonder how dependent that gift was on his native Scotland where Forsyth's eye and the scale of the action seemed perfectly attuned. When Forsyth crossed the Atlantic for *Housekeeping*, a logy adaptation of Marilynne Robinson's novel, one missed the old offbeat charm. Now in *Breaking In*, Forsyth seems dull. Instead of the old deadpan humor, there's just deadpan.

Once again the plot is minimalist. Reynolds plays a stealthy old safecracker. Siemaszko plays an aimless kid who breaks into houses to read the mail and raid the fridge. The old pro meets the young weirdo and decides to recruit him as a partner, teaching him the tricks of the trade. The effect of John Sayles' script, one guesses, is supposed to be soft and melancholic, but the movie never digs in deep enough to make us care about Reynolds or his sidekick, and there isn't enough at the margins to compensate. Even trademark Forsyth scenes, such as one in which the burglars encounter two Doberman pinschers, noodle away without payoffs.

Breaking In did attract some attention as the alleged revival of Reynolds' stalled career. As a graying, gimpy, tired old thief, Reynolds is playing against type and in a decidedly tiny picture that might have been dwarfed by one of his coming attrac-

tions when he was in his heyday. It is the Hollywood equivalent of off-Broadway. Reynolds is perfectly adequate, but if there are veins to be mined here, he doesn't reach them (one imagines what Paul Newman might have done). By turning off his good-ol'-boy appeal, Reynolds deprives the movie of the one thing that might have given it a little charge. By playing against both Forsyth's strength and Reynolds', *Breaking In* winds up like a flattened tire.

DONA FLOR AND HER TWO HUSBANDS ★★★★★

Sonia Braga, Jose Wilker. Directed by Bruno Barreto. 1978. Not rated. (Fox/Lorber-Tamarelle's tape, 116 min., Hi-Fi mono, in Portuguese with English subtitles, \$79.95, available Feb. 15)

BYE BYE BRAZIL ★★★★★

Jose Wilker, Betty Faria, Fabio Junior, Zaira Zambello. Directed by Carlos Diegues. 1980. Not rated. (Fox/Lorber-Tamarelle's tape, 115 min., Hi-Fi mono, in Portuguese with English subtitles, \$79.95, available Feb. 15)

BY MOLLY HASKELL

These two delights of Brazil's Cinema Nuovo, which took US theatrical audiences by surprise in the early '80s, are, more than anything, a celebration of the spirit and flesh of Brazil.

In *Dona Flor*, Braga ("gorgeous from top to bottom" as she describes herself with humor and without overstatement) loses her womanizing, scapegrace husband in the first scene. He dies during Carnival, of what might be called (to quote another movie line) "macho burn-out." But the handsome devil returns as a very corporeal ghost when Dona Flor marries a prosperous pharmacist. She gets to have her cake and eat it too, in the manner usually reserved for philandering men. That the whole concept and sensual delight of the farce is rooted in the sunny, uninhibited atmosphere of Brazil was proved when a 1982 American remake (*Kiss Me Goodbye*, with James Caan, Sally Field

and Jeff Bridges) fizzled completely.

Even as it offers a fascinating look at the architecture and social class structure of a section of Rio, *Dona Flor* is more centrally about carnal landscapes—the luscious bronze flesh and supple bodies of Braga and Wilker as they entwine in a fuller appreciation of each other than they had during their early marriage. There's a tendency here, as in the work of certain other Latin American writers, to sentimentalize sex as the ultimate life force that defeats even time and death. My own reflex, on first seeing the movie, was skepticism toward the presumed irresistibility of the Wilker figure as the free spirit incarnate—the irresponsible Latin husband who gambles, drinks and whores (can a heavy drinker really carry out his duties as a Don Juan?), a man whom everyone disapproves of but secretly adores. But upon second viewing, on video, I was completely seduced by the movie's mixture of farce and fantasy, the lovely counterpoint between Wilker and the stolid husband, and the brilliant last scene in which the happy trio emerges from a church service—Braga and Husband II in their Sunday best and, on the other side of Braga, hand on her voluptuous backside, the impishly nude Wilker ready for play.

Bye Bye Brazil focuses on two couples who join forces in a traveling carnival act. Through their picaresque journey, writer-director Diegues provides us with a wonderfully original, poignant look at a schizoid Brazil—a country caught, on the one hand, between vast areas of poverty and primitivism, and, on the other, tiny pockets of prosperity where everyone is desperately trying to become a citizen of the late-20th-century global village. When the ringleader (the talented Wilker again, this time with dark hair and an M.C.'s goatee) spies television antennae (or fishbones, as he calls them) in the most remote villages of the north, he knows his act will be in trouble.

As in *Dona Flor*, sex is high on the agenda. This is a place of eternal sun, where natural exuberance takes precedence over puritanical inhibitions. Diegues is a sophisticated moviemaker, aware of American and European movie traditions, but he has made a work that is all his own and indigenous to Brazil. The moving and funny members of the "Caravan Rolide!" play out their destinies on a canvas that is rich with social and cultural perceptions.

I highly recommend this double bill to video renters with only one reservation: When the all-white subtitles appear on a light background they can be difficult to read without freeze-framing the image.

Molly Haskell is the author of the best-selling *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Film*.

Neal Gabler has been a critic for *Detroit Monthly* and the *SoHo News*.

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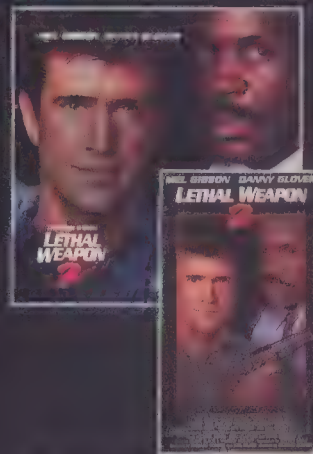
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SLEEPER OF THE MONTH

A FORGOTTEN TUNE FOR THE FLUTE ★★☆☆

Leonid Flatov, Tatiana Dogileva, Irina Kupchenko. Directed by Eldar Ryazanov. Rated PG-13. 1989. (Fries tape, 131 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95, now available)

BY JOANNA LANGFIELD

In case you still have any lingering doubts about the realities of *glasnost*, the Russians keep sending us cultural proof of their new, more open society. The Red Army Chorus has been touring the US singing "God Bless America" to astonished audiences. And now comes this movie, the first to reach our shores with a story about the personal impact of recent social changes on the Soviets themselves. That such a story was filmed in the first place is one thing (consider-

ing past Soviet censorship); the fact that it's being released overseas so soon is even more amazing—and hopeful.

I'm not sure which actor or actress plays which part (the credits on my review copy were in Cyrillic script), but the cast is quite good. The story involves a bureaucrat in the Leisure Time Directories who is hospitalized with a minor heart attack and begins an extramarital affair with his nurse. He rediscovers his passion for life, and for the flute. But their love must contend with entrenched social and political hypocrisies. Romantic comedy and satire are mixed with devastating drama before the end.

The video transfer is fine, except for the white English subtitles occasionally fading into whitish backgrounds. (If only all companies would adopt the yellow subtitles Orion and Nelson now use on



Dogileva: *glasnost* from the inside.

their foreign-language releases!)

On several levels, this is a grand rental. Not only is it fine, intimate entertainment, but it also puts us directly in touch with some of the complexities of *glasnost* within the USSR.

Joanna Langfield is a critic for LBS Movietime Radio Network.

SLIPSTREAM ★★☆☆

Bob Peck, Bill Paxton, Kitty Aldridge, Mark Hamill, Ben Kingsley, F. Murray Abraham. Directed by Steven M. Lisberger. Rated PG-13. 1989. (MCEG/Virgin tape, 92 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$79.95, now available)

BY GREGORY P. FAGAN

What's this? Darth Vader's son sandwiched between Oscar-winning heavy-



Future shock: Aldridge, Hamill.

weights Abraham and Kingsley? And produced by the same team that made *Star Wars*? "How," a sci-fi fan might ask, "could I have missed this in the theaters?" Well, forget about the business concerns that kept this ambitious sleeper off the big

screen (even such '80s classics as *Brazil* and *Blade Runner* had lackluster box-office runs) and give it a chance on video.

Even on a 26-inch set, *Slipstream* succeeds in the same way as those Terry Gilliam and Ridley Scott pictures did. It creates a hypothetical world that both engages and disorients the viewer. Nothing—setting, plot, characters—is clearly drawn in the traditional American style. Suffice it to say that it's the future. WWII appears to have left the world in a neo-Wild West state, and everybody's much more cynical.

If you can't get too wrapped up in whether cowboy Paxton or bounty hunter Hamill (looking so much like an old Richard Basehart it's *scary*) will eventually deliver prisoner Peck to the authorities, you can always appreciate the lavish F/X. The Kingsley and Abraham cameos also add a degree of so-that's-where-they-are-now charm to the proceedings. *Brazil* it's not, but fantasy fans fond of work from fertile minds will still find ample entertainment here.

THE BIG PICTURE ★★☆☆

Kevin Bacon, Emily Longstreth, J.T. Walsh. Directed by Christopher Guest. 1989. Rated PG-13. (RCA/Columbia tape, 100 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95, available Feb. 28) □

BY DOUG BROD

In *The Big Picture*, *This Is Spinal Tap* alumnus Guest and co-scenarists Michael McKean and Michael Varhol have fashioned a smart, riotously funny satire of the state of moviemaking today—the deals,

the studio politics and, oh yes, the talent. Bacon stars as an aspiring director who, after winning the admiration of a big-time producer (a deadpan Walsh), sees his pet project develop from a three-character B&W adult drama to a flesh-filled beach-party romp. Along the way, he develops a crush on a careerist starlet and manages to alienate just about everyone who ever cared for him.

Guest has assembled a winning supporting cast that would as easily have gotten over had the script been half as witty. Jennifer Jason Leigh speaks in wonderfully quirky body language as Bacon's kooky neobohemian school chum. And Fran Drescher has a terrific bit as Walsh's pampered yenta of a wife, Polo. But the real highlight is an uncredited Martin Short, who, in just five brief scenes, manages to all but run off with the movie. His no-b.s. agent is a classic piece of weirdly controlled comic acting; his manic gestures are so detailed and out there, you can't stop looking at him.

If *The Big Picture* has a weakness, it's the utter conventionality of Bacon and Longstreth's not-supposed-to-be-funny up-and-down romance and the movie's comparatively soft ending. Like *Spinal Tap*, this movie is infused with an insider's intimate knowledge of the subject matter. But unlike that '84 comedy, *The Big Picture* doesn't sustain its edge. It's as if Guest, working for a major Hollywood studio, had to swallow some of the same compromises he mapped out for his protagonist. As a movie with limited ambitions, however, it satisfies each one gloriously. As such, this *Big Picture* holds up extremely well on the small screen.

Gregory P. Fagan is editor of World Screen News and a video columnist for Playboy magazine.

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COOKIE ★★

Emily Lloyd, Peter Falk, Dianne Wiest, Michael V. Gazzo, Ricki Lake. Directed by Susan Seidelman. 1989. Rated R. (Warner tape, 93 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95, available March 29)

BY NEAL GABLER

Whether one wants to admit it or not, watching movies on video creates different expectations from watching movies on theater's screen. Otherwise, why do all of us classify pictures as those we're willing to spring for and those we'll wait to see when the cassette gets released? Sometimes, in fact, our diminished expectations can be pitched so perfectly at a movie's level that it seems far better than it might have seemed had we gone to see it on the "big" screen. To wit *Cookie*.

Movies don't come much smaller than *Cookie*, a little squiggle of a picture about a Mafioso (Falk), just out of jail, who plots revenge on his perfidious partners with the unlikely assistance of his gum-cracking daughter (Lloyd). The charm of this picture is largely in its modesty. It gets the edges of mob life right: the small-time chiselers, the gold pinkie rings, the bouffant hairdos. These are hoods without the romantic trappings. The only thing grand about them is their schemes. It may be a measure of *Cookie*'s attitude that one



Lloyd, Lake (top): mob munchers.

of the mobsters is played with appropriate unctuousness by Jerry Lewis.

Falk and Lloyd are both wonderful, and the script by Alice Arlen and Nora Ephron (*Working Girl* and *When Harry Met Sally...*) is clever, though the tone here is more amiable than hilarious. *Cookie* isn't the sort of movie that will have you holding your sides, but given the appropriate expectations, it's a perfectly satisfying way to pass an evening.

CHILDREN IN THE CROSSFIRE ★★

Charles Haid, Karen Valentine, Julia Duffy. Directed by George Schaefer. 1989. (Vestron tape, 96 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.98, now available)

BY JOANNA LANGFIELD

This is a sturdy but mostly ordinary picture about an extraordinary subject. In a long and rudimentary introduction, we learn the details of the fact-based story: In 1982, an Ireland-born, California-based high-school teacher organized a group that takes Protestant and Catholic children from Northern Ireland and places them in US homes for a summer vacation.

In this made-for-TV dramatization, too much time is spent focusing on the American stars playing the parents. The picture packs a far more powerful wallop when it concentrates on the children. These are semi-tough, frightened boys and girls, raised on streets where civil violence is commonplace. Once they return home, wiser from their visit but still facing a harsh life, the movie becomes much more important and interesting.

The children's performances are seamless—honest, intelligent and engaging. They bring a haunting reality to this well-intentioned, technically fine, but otherwise standard movie.

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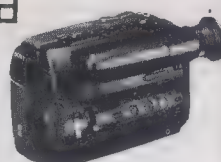
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published in the
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HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS ★★

Rick Moranis, Marcia Strassman, Matt Frewer. Directed by Joe Johnston. 1989. Rated PG. (Touchstone tape, 101 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$22.99, available March 16)

BY LEONARD MALTIN

We live in such a world of perpetual hype, where words like "great" and "brilliant" are tossed about with reckless abandon, that it may seem like faint praise nowadays to call something "good." *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* is not a great

they're shrunk to microscopic size. The kids get thrown out with the trash and have to make their way across the backyard (looking to them like a huge, dense jungle) in order to be saved.

The highlight of this simply plotted tale is a gallery of special effects involving giant-sized insects that dwarf the young kids. These are the work of such modern stop-motion animation geniuses as David Allen and Phil Tippett.

Honey, I Shrunk the Kids manages to create excitement without being violent, and that makes it ideal family fodder. Besides, kids seem to respond best to stories with kids in them.

As in its theatrical showings last fall, this feature is accompanied on the tape by the newest Roger Rabbit cartoon short subject, *Tummy Trouble*. In keeping with the tone set by the Maroon Cartoon, which opened *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, this well-animated short establishes Roger as the hapless victim of Baby Herman's unwitting penchant for catastrophe. *Tummy Trouble* is not a great cartoon, but it moves so fast you don't have time to notice. And it does have some good laughs. I just hope that somewhere down the line, Roger proves to be a bit more versatile; so far it seems as if he's working with a very limited bag of tricks.

W.C. FIELDS STRAIGHT UP ★★

Narrated by Dudley Moore. Directed by Joe Adamson. 1986. (Vestron tape, 95 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$59.98 now available)

THE MARX BROTHERS IN A NUTSHELL ★★

Narrated by Gene Kelly. Directed by Richard Patterson. 1986. (Vestron tape, 100 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$59.98, now available)

BY WILLIAM K. EVERSON

These two career surveys and tributes, made for cable TV just a few years ago, are most welcome additions to any comedy fan's video library.

The Fields entry is the better of the two for the simple reason that individual Fields scenes and even single lines of dialogue can better be excerpted out of context. While I miss a few personal favorites, the selection here is extremely

good, and the producers have been generous in letting the scenes run as long as they need. (It would have been criminal, for example, to cut a single word of salesman Roy Barnes' enquiry after Karl LaFong!) Errors are few and shortcomings are minor. The analysis of Fields' screen character, and why it failed in the '20s and succeeded in the '30s, is rather superficial. But there are quite a few fresh off-screen and publicity clips, plus valuable contributions (some on camera, some via voice-overs) from many of Fields' friends, co-stars and directors. Fields' own exit from one of his last and finest comedies, *The Bank Dick*, would have made a graceful finale to the documentary and they almost give it to us, but then someone decided to go the traditional route via a fast montage of Fields highlights. No matter. Most Fields fanciers will be delighted with the presentation and its fine visual quality. Anybody who is new to Fields (can there be such an animal?) can only be overwhelmed and spurred to rush out and pick up some Fields classics immediately.

As a documentary, the Marx Brothers program is a bit more coherent than the Fields documentary (which sometimes jumps ahead of itself by using movie sequences to illustrate much earlier vaudeville routines). It also allows the guests (writers and directors such as Morrie Ryskind and Norman Krasna) a little more time to reminisce. But what it gains in informational value, it loses (a little) comedically. The Marx Brothers' plots were no more profound than Fields', but their surreal world and controlled insanity were carefully built. A highlight of insanity, without the necessary progression from near-normalcy, just doesn't work. Pieces of such classic scenes as the stateroom sequence or the operatic high jinks of *A Night at the Opera* somehow fall flat out of context.

Marxian devotees, of course, will be able to fill in all the gags, but those who are unfamiliar may come away feeling that the Marxes have been overrated. Yet even if the material sometimes misfires here, the editing is fast and fluid, devoid of the empty spaces (punctuation and laughter gaps designed for theatrical exhibition) that so often hurt their movies when shown on TV or video.

Both tapes are recommended, but the Fields program is a must—not just for its record of so much great comedy, but as a guaranteed spirits-restorer for the direst and blackest of circumstances.

William K. Everson is professor of film at New York University and the New School. He is the author of The Art of W.C. Fields, The Detective in Film, The Films of Laurel and Hardy and many other books on film history.



A bridge too far: Kids head home.

movie, but it is good—especially for family viewing with the kids. I think the ideal word to describe it is "cute."

Moranis, one of the brightest comic actors in movies, plays an absent-minded professor type whose newest invention doesn't quite work—until he's out of the house one day. When his kids and their friends happen to stand in front of it,

Leonard Maltin is a critic-commentator on TV's Entertainment Tonight and the author of Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Cartoon Animation and the bestselling TV Movies & Video Guide.

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ONE NIGHT OF LOVE ★★ ★

Grace Moore, Tullio Carminati, Lyle Talbot. Directed by Victor Schertzinger. B&W. 1934. (RCA/Columbia tape, 80 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95, available March 2)

BY ROY HEMMING

Bravo to RCA/Columbia for pulling out of its vaults this rarely revived and still thoroughly delightful musical romance—one of the first to successfully “humanize” and even “Americanize” the world of classical music.

One Night of Love is an anachronism of its era (the mid-1930s). Its star, Met Opera soprano Grace Moore, had previously made two movie flops for a bigger studio (MGM). Its two leading men were just studio contract players far from the Gable or Grant mold. Its director was best known as an operetta composer—and operettas were definitely in decline at the time. Yet *One Night of Love* became one of 1934's biggest boxoffice hits and, together with Capra's *It Happened One Night* of the same year, helped catapult Columbia Pictures out of its Poverty Row status into the major league of Hollywood studios. It also triggered a whole slew of follow-up movies featuring other opera stars, none of which achieved the success of this one.



Talbot, Moore: “But first, I must sing.”

Then and now, there’ve been some who wondered if it was the pornlike title that enticed audiences expecting a last-gasp bit of risqué moviemaking in a year in which local and national censors were tightening their grips. More likely it was the then-fresh and attractive way in which the movie presented its young heroine (Moore) as a hard-working girl-next-door type from an “average” American family—not some snooty, upper-class highbrow. She doesn’t inherit her classiness, but achieves it through talent, determination, and work—values that still counted and

had appeal in the Depression ’30s. But beyond that subtext, *One Night of Love* was (and is) well-told, tightly paced, lighthearted romantic entertainment, with lots of good musical numbers (including pop-tinged songs as well as arias from *Carmen* and *Madame Butterfly*). The vivacious Moore never was the subtlest of actresses (nor the best lip syncer), but she’s always believable and certainly likable. So’s the whole movie.

KOVACS! ★★ ★

Ernie Kovacs. No director credited. 1971 compilation. (Rhino cassette, 85 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95, now available)

BY JEFFREY B. FUERST

So much has been said about Kovacs’ groundbreaking influence on television comedy, it’s about time a compilation of his work has reached home video. This collection of signature blackout skits and technical wizardry is an unmitigated joy, lending insight into what all the brouhaha has been about since his death in an auto accident in 1962. In this tape, both devotees and neophytes will happily discover and rediscover the comedy genius of Ernie Kovacs.

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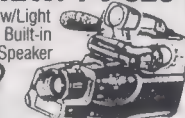
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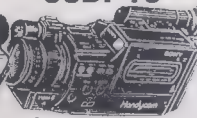
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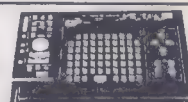
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Droll commercials mock Kovacs' own TV sponsor, Dutch Masters cigars. The Nairobi Trio (chimps in frock coats and derbies) bop each other to the tune of "Solfeggio." As the outrageously fey Percy Dovetonsils, a lisping lush in a leopard-skin smoking jacket, Kovacs sips martinis, spouts rhyming verse and breaks up the crew. Inspired "illustrated music" experiments, in which Kovacs "took sound to sight," such as the syncopated office set to "Sentimental Journey," presaged MTV by 20 years.

A healthy chunk from Kovacs's comic masterpiece, the celebrated silent program about "Eugene," a hapless soul wandering about a stuffy men's club in a pair of squeaking sneakers, caps off the tape. You will wonder how Kovacs pulled off the lunch scene, and, guaranteed, you will not figure it out even with the VCR's pause and slo-mo controls.

This made-for-TV documentary-style compendium culls routines from kinescopes and unrefurbished two-inch videotapes from Kovacs' late period (1959-61). Fans will take the less-than-spectacular visual quality of the archival material and the reverential, sometimes overstated narration in stride.

Comedy specialist Jeffrey B. Fuerst is a former associate curator of the Museum of Broadcasting in New York.

HANK WILLIAMS JR.— FULL ACCESS ★★★

Hank Williams Jr. Directed by George Bloom. 1989. (Cabin Fever tape, 80 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$24.95, now available)

BY DAVE VAN RONK

One of the most endearing things about country-and-western music is the loyalty of its supporters—and their long memories. It's a delight to hear young people speak knowledgeably of recordings made 50 years ago and singers long passed away who are still living presences to them. (Imagine a pop music fan comparing Eddie Cantor's reading of "Makin' Whoopee" to Pearl Bailey's.)

This has nothing to do with musical archaeology, but continuity—an ongoing tradition, changing and evolving to be sure, but with a sound understanding of what has gone before. *Full Access* is a good example of this.

First off, Hank Williams Jr. does not imitate his father. He may not be the world's greatest singer, but as a vocalist and writer, he is his own man. And the continuity is there, sure enough, in the wry "Family Tradition" (a better version here, I think, than on his audio recording), as well as in three songs written by Hank Sr. It's in the change and evolution depart-

ment that *Full Access* runs into problems.

Imagine a supercharged megarock concert, with audience dutifully hysterical and screaming its collective head off. The musicians have their amps cranked up to the "superthrust-excruciating" setting. (Any musician who has played at one of these corroborees will tell you this is pure self-defense.) Now imagine this same event played on your 20-some-odd-inch TV screen. Nope. The excitement, the electricity, just don't transpose.

It's a shame this couldn't have been shot at a smaller venue, where the arrangements and the presentation need not edge into hard rock and the sound would not have a distortion problem. The engineers, I'm sure, struggled mightily with this, and, by and large, they did a good job, but I still had trouble deciphering some lyrics.

Fortunately, there are some less frenetic moments where Hank Jr. just plays and sings—solid stuff, no frills and very nice. We also get some vignettes of life on his Montana ranch, and a bit of his world view. A nice guy, I think, and, all in all, a good program. I'm happy to have it around the house. (Cabin Fever is at 100 W. Putnam, Greenwich, CT 06830.)

Singer-guitarist Dave Van Ronk is one of the nation's best-known authorities on folk and country music.

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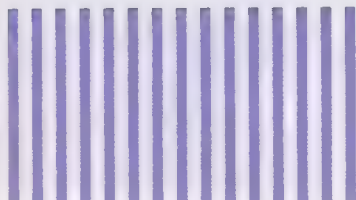


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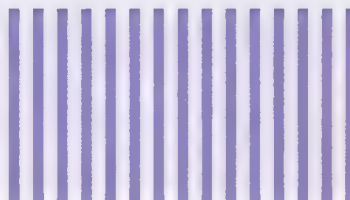


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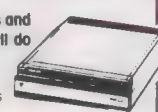
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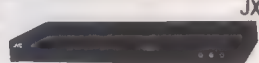
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(which closes the tape) is as epochal as a '60s classic such as "The Last Time." That is, admittedly, an unfair complaint, although it's not as unfair as what most critics wish had happened—that the Stones had gone down in a plane crash around 1972 and become unassailable legends, like Charlie Parker or Buddy Holly.

Still, this is a very long tape and your interest may flag in its later segments—although there's guaranteed to be at least one moment on view here that will have you emitting a Mick Jaggeresque "Who!" at some point—so it seems ultimately churlish to carp. You or I should be so cool after 25 years.

PUT IT THERE ★★ ★

Paul McCartney, Directed by Geoff Wonfor. 1989. (PolyGram tape, 65 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.95, now available)

BY JIM FARBER

As its title implies, *Put It There* offers a casual musical handshake with one of the friendliest figures in pop history: Paul McCartney. The program, originally a cable TV special, is mainly a plug for his latest album, *Flowers in the Dirt*, and re-

Jim Farber is a columnist and critic for the New York Daily News and Rolling Stone.

cent US tour, his first in 13 years.

Accordingly, some parts of the program seem like something out of a video press kit. There are brief interview bits explaining how various songs on the album were put together, including discussions of why a particular key was chosen or which brand-name bass was used—stuff for die-hards only. Musical performances are sometimes used fleetingly, merely to illustrate a point. This is especially frustrating when teamed with something as tantalizing as a clip of Elvis Costello (McCartney's collaborator on several recent tracks) performing his own version of Paul's single "My Brave Face."

Luckily, though, there are full performances here as well, covering such worthy new material as "Pieces of Eight," as well as the Beatles' "Fool on the Hill" and such seminal oldies as "Lucille" and "Just Because." These are all tossed off with an infectious informality. (Many are caught during band rehearsals.) Similarly, in the interviews McCartney is as likably unpretentious as ever. All in all, the program has a sweetness and ease long-time fans should warm to.

THE WORLDS BELOW ★★

No director credited. 1988. (Sea Studios tape, 50 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$29.95, now available)

BY STEVE SCHNEIDER

Max Ernst meets Swamp Thing—or so it seems—in this colorful tour of the murky depths of California's Monterey Bay. Rife with images that run from the surreal to the stunning to the just plain icky, this underwater reverie begins with a sequence of six sub-sea music videos: explorations of flora and fauna at various Bay depths, each set to different, though generally sappy, synthesized scores. Thereafter comes another descent through much of the same footage, *sans* music but with explanatory narration by Dr. Sylvia Earle, whose professional credentials are unspecified.

Many of the sightings are startling, from undulant undersea forests to plankton storms to galloping starfish (via time-lapse photography). But the reverent, New Age tone of the billowing, arpeggiated music and Dr. Earle's strivings for lyricism, can be off-putting. And the reuse of footage seems like faulty organization: It makes us think we've been short-changed. More could have been made of this frequently excellent underwater photography. (Sea Studios is at 810 Cannery Row, Monterey, CA 93940.)

Documentary specialist Steve Schneider has written for the New York Times, Art in America and the Village Voice.

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ANYONE CAN VCR ★

Directed by Bic Pedeville, Jeanne Gorman and Aaron Spiegel. 1989.

(Treasure Coast Media cassette, approx. 25 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95, now available)

BY JOHN R. QUAIN

An instructional videocassette on how to hook up and operate your VCR? If you don't know how to *run* the machine, how are you going to watch the tape? The producers of *Anyone Can VCR* anticipated this objection and provided two basic diagrams on the back of the cassette box to help.

What the producers apparently didn't anticipate is how difficult it is to create a good how-to program. Clunky direction and mundane narration aside, what this tape suffers from most is a lack of focus. It's too simplistic for VCR owners who at least know basic record-play functions, yet it's too cavalier for Mom and Dad (who keep phoning you to ask how to set the timer for *Wheel of Fortune*). Time-shifting functions, for example, vary from machine to machine, so the basic instructions *Anyone Can VCR* provides aren't much help.

The potential benefits of a VCR instructional tape are several, but this one never covers such subjects as how to prevent

tape and head wear. As it stands, this is not an idea whose time has come. (Treasure Coast Media is at P.O. Box 2155, Jensen Beach, FL 34958.)

FELIX THE CAT: THE MAGIC BAG OF TRICKS; ROCK BOTTOM FAILS AGAIN; POINDEXTER AND THE FLYING SAUCER ★

Animated featurettes. Produced by Joseph Oriolo. 1989 compilations. (Three VidAmerica cassettes, approx. 30 min. each, Hi-Fi mono, \$6.98 each, \$17.98 for a three-pack)

BY RICH CONATY

Felix the Cat was the first comic-strip character to originate in motion pictures. Under the byline of Pat Sullivan, Felix was introduced to film audiences in 1919 as a feline equivalent of Charlie Chaplin. His tail even doubled as a cane. By 1930, when the series stopped, nearly 200 Felix cartoons were in circulation. In 1960, 260 new Felix adventures were produced for television. VidAmerica has compiled 12 of these later ones for home video. Any resemblance to the revered Felix of old is coincidental.

In *The Magic Bag of Tricks*, Felix and his bag are pursued by the Professor. The luggage in question is given a good workout. It turns into an escalator and a boat. All the Professor seems to do is stand around saying, "I must have that little bag!" Felix is not exactly a bundle of laughs, either. When he is launched into space, he quips, "Wow! I like to travel, but this is ridiculous!" Bugs Bunny shouldn't lose any sleep over this cat.

Rock Bottom Fails Again pits Felix against a gangster bulldog on the Professor's payroll. In *Poindexter and the Flying Saucer*, the Professor is a good guy. He's hired Felix to babysit his nephew, Poindexter. The lad builds a flying saucer that strands the pair on the moon.

Frankly, I found almost nothing in these cartoons to recommend for either kids or nostalgic grownups. They are extremely low-budget affairs, so animation is minimal. The plots and dialogue are inane. Several contain self-inflicted violence, and there are two regrettable incidents of ethnic stereotyping. The soundtrack is frequently noisy, and, as these cartoons were originally produced for television, there are built-in breaks and recaps.

Although the tapes' theme song says your "sides will ache" with laughter, Felix seems to be the only one in stitches. Perhaps he'd been watching *Bullwinkle*.

Rich Conaty is former associate curator of the Museum of Broadcasting and host of WFUV Radio's The Big Broadcast.

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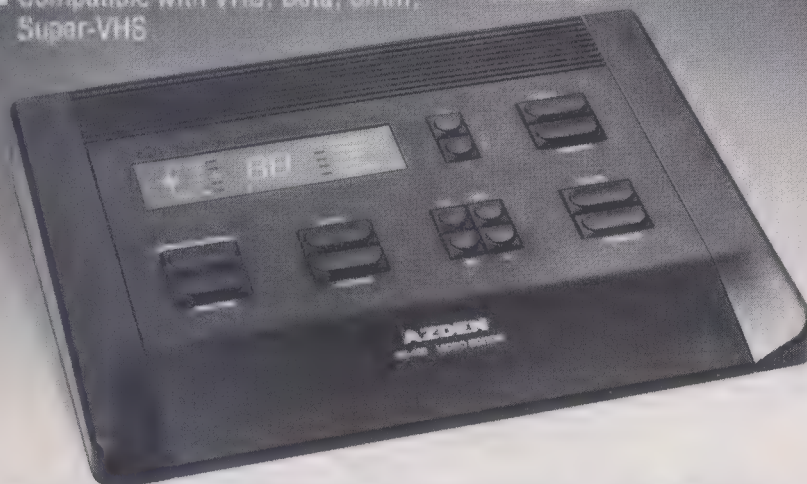
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TICKLE TUNE TYPHOON: LET'S BE FRIENDS ★★★★★

The Tickle Tune Typhoon troupe.

Directed by James Eaton. 1989.

(Tickle Tune Typhoon cassette, 50 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.98, now available)

BY GENEVIEVE A. KAZDIN

Many families already know the Typhoon's audiotapes, which have won awards from the American Library Association and *Parents' Choice*. This is the group's first video, reflecting the same high quality and standards.

Videotaped at a live concert performance in Washington state, most of the songs are original, with simple, easy-to-learn melodies (a song sheet is included). Yet the music itself is sophisticated and complex—and very interesting. The topics covered include recycling, dental hygiene, eating veggies and others rarely found in kid entertainment. No, there's no pontificating; this is fun.

Interspersed with message material are lively action songs. "Kye Kye Kule," a Ghanaian children's song, "Hokey Pokey" and "Sneakers" are sure to get young viewers up and moving. A small dance company joins the musicians, bringing the action down into the audience. (Tickle Tune Typhoon is at P.O. Box 15153, Seattle, WA 98115.)

WEE SING IN SILLYVILLE ★★★★★

Renee Margolin, Joy Anderson, Ryan Willard. Directed by David Poulschok. 1989. (Price Stern Sloan cassette, 60 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95, now available)

The *Wee Sing* videotapes (this is No. 4) seem to inspire discussion: Many adults don't like them; most youngsters do.

Because *Wee Sing* is designed for kids from ages two to eight—not for parents or caretakers—young tastes and needs are the first consideration. Just as we don't expect a two-year-old to be entranced by *Live from the Met*, perhaps we shouldn't expect to enjoy everything that our children do. Yes, we should be certain the content is suitable for the child's age and that moral or ethical values are those we espouse for our children.

As for *Wee Sing in Sillyville*, I'm all for it. We hear dozens of nonsense songs, hand-action songs and rounds, not only well sung but also nicely danced. A song booklet is enclosed, making it easier to learn "A Ram Sam Sam," "Risseldy, Rosseldy" and all the others. The production is beautifully photographed, with good sound quality. (G.A.K.)

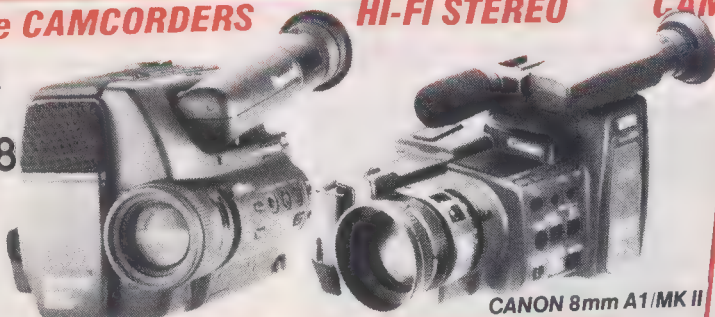
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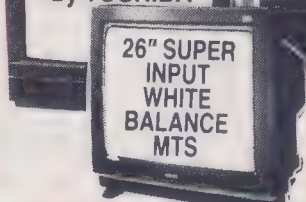
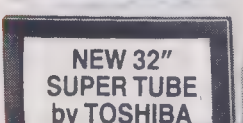
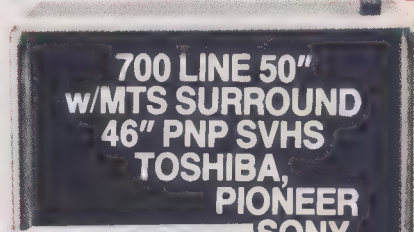
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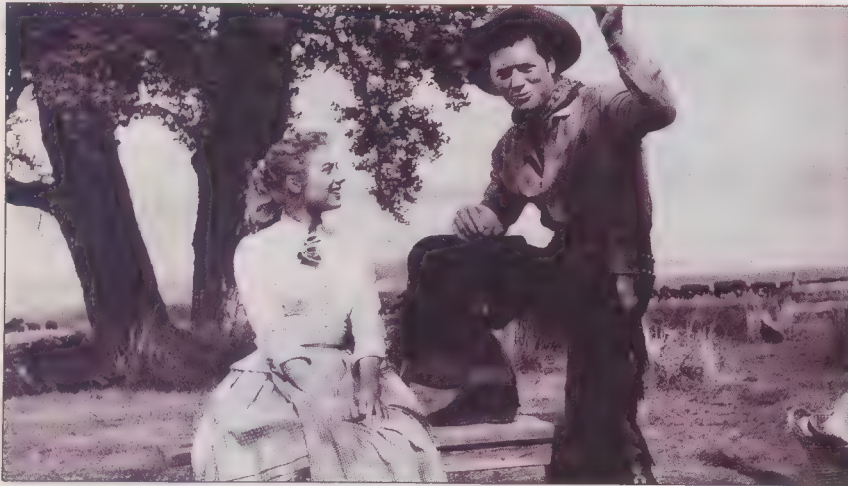


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Oklahoma!'s Jones, MacRae: Oh, what a beautiful movie.

OKLAHOMA! ★★★★★

Gordon MacRae, Shirley Jones, Gloria Grahame, Rod Steiger. Directed by Fred Zinnemann. 1955. (Two CBS/Fox CLV discs, 147 min., CX stereo, letterboxed, \$69.98, now available)

SOUTH PACIFIC ★★

Mitzi Gaynor, Rossano Brazzi, John Kerr, Juanita Hall. Directed by Joshua Logan. 1958. (Two CBS/Fox CLV discs, 158 min., CX stereo, letterboxed, \$69.98, now available)

THE SOUND OF MUSIC ★★★★★

Julie Andrews, Christopher Plummer, Eleanor Parker, Peggy Wood. Directed by Robert Wise. 1965. (Two CBS/Fox CLV discs, 177 min., digital stereo, letterboxed, \$69.98, now available)

BY RONALD HAVER

Fans of these Rodgers and Hammerstein classics should be delighted with these new disc releases. Previous video versions were disappointing because of the panning and scanning necessary to cram the widescreen image into standard video dimensions. The new editions restore the full image by letterboxing.

All three musicals were originally filmed in the Todd-AO 65mm process, with images of unsurpassed clarity and detail. The six-track Todd-AO magnetic

sound system was also advanced for its time. The new laser discs of *South Pacific* and *The Sound of Music* have both been remastered from 35mm "print downs" of the 65mm original negatives, and the new digital tracks are direct mix-downs from the six-track originals.

The letterboxing of its images adds considerably to the dramatic impact of *South Pacific*, which needs all the help it can get. A major disappointment when first released theatrically, it was misconceived, miscast and generally misdirected by Logan (the co-author and director of the original Broadway version). Its few assets included exotic locations and Leon Shamroy's lush color photography, which were both considerably diminished in the panned-and-scanned version. Restored to its full width, the new LV release takes on a visual splendor to compensate for the movie's lack of drama and excitement.

The Sound of Music, which most critics agree was a vast improvement over the stage original, also benefits from letterboxing—restoring Ted McCord's Academy Award-winning cinematography to its natural grandeur. One delightful bit of background action is again visible: As Julie Andrews joyfully strides along the road singing "I Have Confidence in Me," a frisky young colt canters along the edge of the scene adding a visual counterpoint.

Oklahoma! remains one of the best movie versions of any Broadway musical, capturing perfectly the spirit and vitality of the stage original. The chief beneficiary of this new letterboxed edition is Agnes de Mille's trend-setting choreography. Her witty, imaginative dance

numbers suffered greatly in the panned-and-scanned version, with whole groups of dancers disappearing from the frame and dozens of significant dramatic details being eliminated. It isn't just the dance sequences that benefit. Director Zinnemann's use of nature and landscape to create an airy, spacious mood and enhance dramatic effects was lost in the claustrophobic panning and scanning.

Oklahoma! was filmed simultaneously in Todd-AO and 35mm CinemaScope, and the new video remastering utilizes the negative from the latter. In some scenes the image is marred by slight scratches and glitches, evidently a result of negative damage. A noticeable hiss can be heard on some of the quieter sections of the soundtrack, due to the fact that it is mixed from the four-track 'Scope track, which in turn was mixed down from the six-track Todd-AO original. Even so, the soundtrack has a richness that is forcefully conveyed in this new digital edition.

The images on all three discs are sharp and detailed, the colors rich and true (with some lapses in *South Pacific*, due mainly to the debatable "color experiments" tried by director Logan to add drama to the musical numbers). Each movie comes complete with overture (except *The Sound of Music*, which never had one), intermission, entr'acte and exit music. *South Pacific* comes with an added bonus, a B&W promotional short called "Insight on *South Pacific*," which explains the Todd-AO process, gives glimpses of the filming, and of the New York and Hollywood premieres.

CBS/Fox, however, seems to be cutting back on chapter-stop encoding. Otherwise, these discs are outstanding examples of the advantages of letterboxing and digital sonics for important musical classics.

THE MANY FACES OF BIRD ★★★★★

Bobby McFerrin, Richie Cole, Lee Konitz, James Moody, Bud Shank. Produced by Jack Lewis. 1987. (PolyGram CLV disc, digital stereo, 57 min., \$24.95, now available)

BY DAVID HAJDU

He had a big hit record and President Bush played it a lot during his campaign—fair enough. But top-billed McFerrin just doesn't seem to belong here. This is a program of be-bop classics made famous by the father of the form, alto saxist Charlie Parker.

After a brief intro by comedian Rich Hall, whose connection with jazz and

David Hajdu is East Coast music editor of The Hollywood Reporter.

Parker is as mysterious as a Bird solo, *The Many Faces of Bird* presents a seven-piece be-bop band in a performance of six Parker classics, recorded live on stage at Los Angeles' Wilton Theater. A few of the veteran players, including bassist Monty Budwig, pianist Lou Levy, alto saxist Konitz and altoist Moody, performed with Parker during his life, and their command of be-bop is unquestioned. Only altoist Cole, whose playing has always had a grating edge, seems at odds with the rest of this fluent ensemble.

Most of the tunes are relatively formal arrangements of Parker material, with his recorded solos transcribed virtually verbatim, but with room for improvising in the Parker style. Regrettably, there are no chapter breaks programmed into the disc, so listeners cannot skip chapters by remote control or program their disc equipment to play songs in a different sequence. This undercuts the value of this disc edition in relation to Verve/PolyGram's simultaneously released VHS tape edition (at \$19.98).

The biggest problem with both editions is McFerrin. A capable singer with fine pitch and a good variety of vocal timbres, he chooses to use his voice purely instrumentally here—scat singing both his own improvisations and memorized Parker solos. Unfortunately, he just can't hold his own in the company of be-bop masters like Konitz and Moody. Performing on virtually every song, McFerrin frequently resorts to corny arpeggios and gag sounds, sparking more laughs in one hour than Bird probably heard in a life of gigs.

La Dolce Vita's Mastroianni, Ekberg: Oh, what a not-so-sweet life.



LA DOLCE VITA ★★★★★

Marcello Mastroianni, Anita Ekberg, Anouk Aimee. Directed by Federico Fellini. 1961. (Two Republic/Image LV discs, 180 min., CX mono, letterboxed, in Italian with English subtitles, \$69.95, now available)

BY RONALD HAVER

La Dolce Vita catapulted director/co-writer Fellini to international fame nearly 30 years ago. It quickly became the most controversial European movie in years. Members of the Roman senate demanded that it be withdrawn, charging that it damaged Italy's national honor. The Vatican condemned it. The Jesuits praised it. It was awarded the prestigious Golden Palm at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival.

La Dolce Vita (literally the sweet life) is Fellini's vision of corrupt, decadent, affluent Roman society of the '60s. With vivid, poetic imagery, the movie details the spiritual decay and sexual excesses of its leading characters amid a life that was, for all its irony, haunting and strangely beautiful. It ends with an enigmatic, Yeatsian allusion to the Second Coming.

This laser disc edition does justice to Fellini's images by restoring the full width of the CinemaScope frame through letterboxing, revealing all the stunning visuals of Fellini and Oscar-winning art director Piero Gherardi. The video transfer beautifully catches every nuance of the lustrous black-and-white cinematography of Otello Martelli, while Nino Rota's superb score is enhanced considerably by the carefully rerecorded digital sound-

track. English subtitles are placed in the black area underneath the image, making for easier reading and no distracting interference with the rich, vivid detail that fills every frame of the movie and is as essential to its total impact.

FOLK CITY: THE 25th ANNIVERSARY CONCERT ★★

Joan Baez, Suzanne Vega, Odetta, Eric Andersen, the Violent Femmes, Roger McGuinn, David Massengill, Tom Paxton, Arlo Guthrie, Richie Havens. Directed by Robert Klug. 1989. (Image Entertainment LV disc, 60 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$39.95, now available)

BY STEVE SIMELS

Folk City, the venerable Greenwich Village club famous for launching Bob Dylan, closed in 1986, a victim of skyrocketing New York rents. Its closing is ironic, given that the long-awaited (by some) folk-music revival finally happened three years later. In any case, before the shrine closed down, a number of performers—both veterans and younger wannabes—got together for an anniversary show, taped for cable and now released on laser disc.

The result is a generally watchable hour, but not particularly thrilling. There are short sets from each of the stars intercut with backstage reminiscences. The old-timers (Havens, Guthrie, Baez, Paxton) sound defensive and deliberately anachronistic, while the new guard (Vega, the Femmes, Canadian lesbian feminist Ferron) seem studiously quirky and less than convincing in their declarations of fealty to the Great Tradition.

There are a couple of unexpected, genuinely compelling performances. Frank Christian, a terrific blues guitarist with a nifty, leather-jacketed, deadpan cool, significantly subtracts from the overall Prententiousness Quotient during his brief solo turn, and dulcimer-playing ironist Massengill all but steals the disc with "Sightseer," an ode to a not-so-accidental tourist which suggests a cross between Steve Martin and the B-52s. Meanwhile, old vet Andersen projects so much soulfulness and charisma that you wonder why he's never broken into the mainstream.

The 25th Anniversary Concert will please those for whom acoustic guitars and lyrics about freedom automatically signify something aesthetically important. But, watching the disc, I realized it wasn't the onslaught of the British Invasion and rock 'n' roll that derailed the folk movement—it was the almost palpably smug insularity of the various performers' worldviews.

Image's picture and sound (especially the latter), by the way, are first-rate.

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RULES OF THE GAME ★★★★★

Marcel Dalio, Nora Gregor, Julien Carette, Jean Renoir, Gaston Modot.
Directed by Renoir. 1939. B&W. (Two Criterion Collection discs, CAV, 107 min., plus untimed interactive material, digital and analog stereo soundtracks, with commentary on the analog track, \$89.95, now available)

BY GLENN KENNY

Like Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, this is a big favorite among academic cineastes. That shouldn't put you off, though, especially since this Criterion Collection disc renders Renoir's classic with far more clarity than the battered, washed-out 16mm prints currently on the campus-screening/reperatory-theater circuit do. The source material for the transfer is not perfect (sadly, "perfect" material probably no longer exists), but it's plainly better than any print I've seen in a theater, and the transfer is remarkably conscientious.

The difference this makes in the actual enjoyment of Renoir's movie is monumental. The crisp tones of the black-and-white cinematography come through in all their glory, revealing Renoir's mastery of light and the intricacies of his deep-focus compositions.

As for the movie itself, this tragicomedy of the French upper class "dancing on the edge of a volcano" just prior to World War II is a masterpiece of construction and execution, just like all the film professors say. However, there are two things that its legions of devotees sometimes overlook. One is that it's perhaps the most perfectly acted movie ever, with beautifully modulated performances from all the members of Renoir's vast ensemble. Particularly brilliant are Dalio (later reduced to playing croupiers in such Hollywood productions as *Casablanca* and *The Shanghai Gesture*) as the pathetic Marquis De Chesnaye, and Modot as the not-quite-cuckolded gameskeeper, Schumacher. Second is the often-underrated entertainment level of the picture. It's delightfully witty and incredibly absorbing, moving at a spanking pace even though many of its shots are sustained for lengths of up to two minutes.

The supplementary materials on this disc edition are very good. Director Peter Bogdanovich reads a commentary by Renoir scholar Alexander Sesonske, which is, for the most part, illuminating. There are a few gaps, however, that might confuse viewers who aren't already Renoir experts, such as a reference to the character Octave's "failed musical career"—a career not mentioned in the movie itself, but something that's made explicit in an early scenario for *Rules* that Sesonske doesn't mention. The disc ends

with a delightful excerpt from Jacques Rivette's documentary *Jean Renoir Le Patron*, shot 25 years after *The Rules of the Game*'s disastrous premiere, showing Dalio and Renoir reminiscing about the making of the picture.

The newly added subtitles are easy to read but often fail to convey the subtleties of the French dialogue. For example, when two female characters discuss the possibility of friendship with a male, one of them says, "You might as well talk of the moon at midday," for which the subtitles read, "I'll believe it when I see it." Well, *tant pis*, as they say.

THE LAND BEFORE TIME ★★★★★

Animated feature. Voices of Pat Hingle, Helen Shaver. Directed by Don Bluth. 1989. Rated G. (Two MCA CAV discs, digital stereo, matrix surround, 69 min. plus untimed interactive section, \$49.98, now available) □

BY DAVID HAJDU

There are some 100,000 different drawings in this movie. Every one has George Lucas written all over it.

Co-produced by Lucas and Steven Spielberg (and several others), *The Land Before Time* is the Stone Age *Star Wars*, a formula movie with all the usual Lucas ingredients—a story so simple it's scarcely a story, lots of action and enough non-sectarian spiritualism to make the whole thing seem obliquely deep and meaningful. Of course, Spielberg has also been known to favor the same ingredients, but almost always when he's cooking in collaboration with Lucas.

The only sign of director Don Bluth is the high technical quality of the animation. This picture, about an orphaned baby brontosaurus who ventures with four prehistoric animal friends in search of the Great Valley, has little of the originality, charm or style of Bluth's previous animated movies, *The Secret of NIMH* and *An American Tail*.

Nevertheless, this disc edition makes for fascinating viewing as a disc. Pressed in the CAV format, it allows animation fans the rare opportunity to enjoy every beautifully rendered, individual drawing frame by frame. Only a handful of well-animated feature-length animated productions have so far been released on CAV, and every one is a treasure.

As a welcome plus, this edition also includes an extra chapter of publicity stills, some of which do not appear in the movie itself. There's also a modest collection of supplementary materials, including the theatrical trailer and some production notes and biographical sketches of the movie's creators, in text form.

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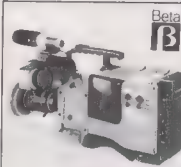
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PUCCINI: TURANDOT ★★★★★
Eva Marton, Plácido Domingo, Leona Mitchell, Paul Plishka. Conducted by James Levine. Directed by Kirk Brown-ing. 1988. (Two Deutsche Grammophon/PolyGram CLV discs, CD stereo, \$59.95, now available)

BY CHRISTIE BARTER

The Metropolitan Opera's latest (1987) production of Puccini's exotic final opera, *Turandot*, has been acclaimed for both its musical values and its dazzlingly opulent staging by Franco Zeffirelli. The physical production, in fact, is without doubt the most elaborate ever seen at the house. If any opera can be said to take this kind of scenic overkill, *Turandot* is it. Surprisingly, it also comes across in all its splendor on the video screen, an achievement for which veteran TV director Kirk Browning can take full credit.

Soprano Marton, in resplendent voice right from the highly charged opening notes of her notoriously difficult aria "In questa reggia," is also a veteran in the role of the icy Princess, as is tenor Domingo as her suitor, Calaf. Both have performed and recorded *Turandot* before, but not as compellingly as they project it here. Conductor Levine draws some glorious (and well recorded) sound from the Met's fine orchestra and chorus.

This is a stunning job by all hands. And since it is not yet available as an audio recording on compact disc, this laser disc edition is a *Turandot* for audiophiles to cherish as well.

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NATURAL LIGHT—WINDANCE ★★★

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BY ROY HEMMING

The success of the Windham Hill video releases has spurred dozens of copycats that combine beautiful cinematography (often of the scenic calendar variety) with relaxing mood-music soundtracks (usually, if not always accurately, labeled New Age music). Most have been far more im-

An updated paperback edition of Roy Hemming's book *Discovering Great Music on CDs, LPs & Cassettes (from Baroque to New Age)* becomes available from New-market Press on March 15.



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Eva Marton, Placido Domingo, Leona Mitchell, Paul Plishka. Conducted by James Levine. Directed by Kirk Browning. 1988. (Two Deutsche Grammophon/PolyGram CLV discs, CD stereo, \$59.95, now available)

BY CHRISTIE BARTER

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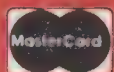
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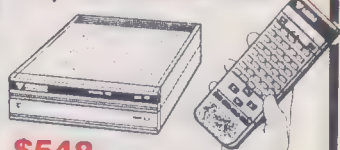
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pressive for the quality and imagination of their visuals than their music, which the "marriage" of CD audio to laser discs now accentuates. In past reviews, I've even suggested turning off the video sound altogether on some and substituting a favorite recording of your own. So I was delighted to find on the jacket of *Illumination* these lines: "To enhance [repeated viewings], try experimenting... with different soundtracks of your favorite music."

Actually, the music on the *Illumination* disc (by Iasos, Constance Demby, Jonn Serie and Tom Moore) is some of the best and most appropriate I've heard for this kind of program. But the disc is really about Ken Jenkins' remarkable visuals—a constantly shifting series of layered abstract images which have been created by using lasers, lumia and various optical effects, modified through video switcher mixing and special-effects projectors. These images are mesmerizingly beautiful, richly yet subtly colored, and unfailingly fascinating.

Windance also wins high marks for David Fortney's visuals, which look at nature (flowers, trees, flowing brooks, snowscapes, clouds and so on) from the point of view of a spirit being wafted through various scenes by the wind. Okay, so it's hokey—but it's effective. Visually, that is. The music, however, is

mostly a boring, repetitious mix of routine synthesizer and acoustic sounds. (Lumivision is at 1490 Lafayette St., Denver, CO 80218-2393.)

THE GREAT QUAKE OF '89 ★★★★★

Diane Sawyer. Directed by Len Schneiderman. 1989. (ABC News/Voyager CAV disc, 60 min. plus untimed supplementary material, \$49.95, now available)

Years ago, people used to save newspapers from the days of certain historic events that had special meaning to them—from joyful ones such as the US landing on the moon to tragedies such as the JFK assassination. Now we can collect video editions. This ABC News disc is a model of how a good one can be quickly put together following a calamitous national event and released as an instant history "keeper."

Highlights from ABC's extensive coverage of the major earthquake that struck the San Francisco Bay area on October 17, 1989 have been deftly compiled into separate chapters focusing on the interrupted World Series game, the fractured Bay Bridge, the collapse of part of Highway 880, the heavily damaged Marina district, and so on. There is some incredible footage taken by non-profes-

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Victor/Victoria (1982), with Julie Andrews, James Garner, Robert Preston. (MGM/UA, letterboxed, \$39.95)

sionals using camcorders during and immediately following the quake, as well as follow-up news coverage of rescue operations and the aftermath. Much of the reportage is inevitably grim, but never sensationalistically so. And such scenes are adroitly interspersed with others showing how San Franciscans pitched in to help neighbors and strangers in their hours of pain and need.

The program also includes a candid report on other areas of the country that seismologists believe are at risk for earthquakes within the next decade (particularly the Memphis, Saint Louis and Seattle regions), and an instructive section on how average citizens in quake-prone areas can help protect their homes, their most treasured possessions and, most importantly, their lives. (R.H.)

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 PV-520 PV-S140
 PV-530 PV-S160
 PV-S540 AG-180
 PV-S550 AG-450

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 PV-2900 PV-4960
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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

Sharp Combination Laser Disc/CD Player, Model MV-D100

As more and more laser disc players appear in the stores, there is an increasing emphasis on features in order to set one player apart from another. In the case of Sharp's \$1,900 MV-D100 combi player, the manufacturer has attempted to pack a lot into one box. This player not only handles eight- and 12-inch laser videodiscs, CD-Vs (compact disc-video), regular five-inch CDs and three-inch CDs, but it also can play up to three CDs or CD-Vs in a row without using a separate cartridge or drawer. Also incorporated into the MV-D100 are several audio convenience features to facilitate tape recording, including a function that automatically scans a disc for the loudest musical passage and then sets the output at an optimum level for recording.

Unfortunately, we were disappointed to find that not all of the audio section's performance measurements were of the caliber we anticipated. Both the de-emphasis and channel separation results revealed some aberrations (see Test Results below), and in the latter test there was more than a 20 dB difference between audio channels, a disparity we were surprised to discover in a player of this type. Usually such specifications are nearly perfect, with a variation of 1 or 2 dB at the most. On the other hand, the video performance of the MV-D100 was certainly up to our benchmarks, demonstrating excellent reproduction of the shades of gray between black and white. Strong video signal-to-noise ratios also promised a clean picture.

FEATURES

The unique feature of the MV-D100 is its three-disc automatic changer function, which enables you to select playback of up to three regular CDs, three-inch CDs or CD-Vs. The MV-D100 also allows you to program up to 20 tracks on laser videodiscs (both eight- and 12-inch discs). With standard-play (CAV, or constant angular velocity) discs, playback can be initiated from any frame number, while playback of extended play (CLV, or constant linear

velocity) discs can commence from any time selected on the disc. The speed and direction of playback is variable, and frame-by-frame viewing is possible with CAV discs. When playing compact discs or CD-Vs, similar programming functions are possible and playback can also be programmed to start at a specific time on the disc.

Three types of editing functions are provided: auto edit eliminates breaks between selections to minimize wasted tape when recording, a convenient auto-fade function

LAB MEASUREMENTS:
Sharp Combination Laser
Disc/CD Player
Model Number: **MV-D100**
Serial Number: **90700958**

VIDEO SECTION

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 4.20 MHz)	
Video Output	-3.10 dB
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (video output)	
Red-Field Chroma (AM/PM)	46.1/38.4 dB
Luminance	46.4 dB

ANALOG AUDIO SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL	
CX On/Off	1.10/.53 Volts
THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT	
CX On/Off	.10/.16%
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (1 kHz, 75% modulation)	
CX On/Off	.06/.11%
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	
CX On/Off	72.3/65.7 dB

DIGITAL AUDIO SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL	
	2.0 Volts
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 0 dB)	
20 Hz	.023%
1 kHz	.007%
10 kHz	.015%
16 kHz	.018%
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	
De-emphasis In	94.2 dB
De-emphasis Out	96.1 dB
DE-EMPHASIS ERROR	
1 kHz	-.03 dB
5 kHz	+.02 dB
16 kHz	-.27 dB
LINEARITY ERROR	
0 dB to -50 dB	-.17 dB

is provided for those who record on cassette decks that have auto reverse, and a search feature called "auto level" adjusts audio output to an appropriate level for recording.

To improve picture quality, Sharp's MV-D100 includes an S-video jack for connection to a similarly equipped monitor. On the digital audio side, the player has several features more commonly found on high-end CD players. The MV-D100 employs eight-times oversampling, twin D/A (digital-to-analog) converters and even pro-

vides a separate optical digital output in case you want to use a separate, outboard D/A converter.

CONTROLS

All the basic function controls of the MV-D100 are located on the front panel beneath the disc tray. A separate volume control is provided to the extreme right. A headphone jack, TV indicator light and level search indicator are positioned toward the left. The display area alerts you to the status of the player, including track, time, program and sound mode.

The aforementioned editing features are activated by additional controls to the right of the display. When you select a tape length in the auto-edit mode, the player will assign the appropriate tracks of the CD to fit onto each side of the audiocassette. You can perform this function for a total of three discs at a time.

A supplied remote control duplicates most of the functions performed by the buttons on the laser player's front panel. In addition to those functions, the remote includes buttons for direct track or chapter/frame access, CX noise reduction, random play, repeat play, audio monitor and memory stop. The rear panel of the combi player sports fixed and variable audio output jacks, coaxial input and output terminals, and a channel 3/4 selector switch.

TEST RESULTS

During the initial tests of the MV-D100, APEL encountered an operational failure that prevented the lab from completing its measurements. After testing the unit for six hours, the variable audio outputs exhibited high distortion at all output levels due to what appeared to be a thermal failure of one of the components. APEL's engineers allowed the player to cool off and the next day, tried again. The high distortion problem recurred.

Meanwhile, independent of our tests, Sharp's quality control department discovered a power-transformer deficiency problem before the MV-D100 was shipped to stores—but not, unfortunately, before it was shipped to us. The manufacturer contacted VR to inform us of the problem, and we agreed to test a second sample of the MV-D100.

When APEL encounters a problem with a component being tested—if it either fails to meet its rated specifications or cannot execute a feature properly—it is our policy to contact the manufacturer and ask for a second sample for testing. Usually, this is done to ensure that the component has not been damaged in shipping.

Indeed, the performance of the second unit revealed no major defects on the order of the previous sample (see Lab Measurements chart). Picture resolution of the MV-D100 was comparable to any video-

disc player we've measured recently, with video frequency response extending out to 4.20 MHz and an attenuation of only -3.10 dB. Color reproduction was accurate (Fig. 1), and staircase linearity (the player's ability to accurately reproduce the shades of



Fig. 1. Color purity: accurate.

gray between black and white) was excellent, with maximum deviation from perfect linearity never exceeding 3%. Video signal-to-noise ratios were better than average as well (though down about 1.6 dB from the manufacturer's specification).

As for the analog audio section, with or without CX noise reduction, its distortion was so low as to be inaudible. With the CX filter on, audio signal-to-noise ratios were quite good at 72.3 dB.

Digital audio signal-to-noise measurements ranged from 94.2 dB to 96.1 dB—again, slightly below the manufacturer's rating of 98 dB, but still good. Harmonic distortion at 1 kHz was an inaudible .007%, with frequency response remaining flat (within 1 dB of deviation) through the entire human-hearing range. Still, there were two performance measurements that were not up to the level we would expect from a \$1,900 component.

APEL's laboratory tests revealed that in the de-emphasis mode, the player yielded poorer signal-to-noise measurements than it did when not in this mode. This is the inverse of what should occur. Though we cannot account for this result—nor perhaps would most users notice the 1.9 dB difference—we suspect that the de-emphasis circuit was installed incorrectly. In addition, digital audio channel separation tests revealed a 20 dB difference between channels. For the record, these two measurements were also found in the first sample we attempted to test.

Although the combi player performed well in terms of picture reproduction, our tests raised concerns about its digital audio section. We measured two samples, and we cannot guarantee that other units will perform up to spec. If the extensive features of the Sharp MV-D100 combi player seem appealing, a prospective purchaser should have the unit thoroughly checked by the dealer's service department beforehand.

—John R. Quain

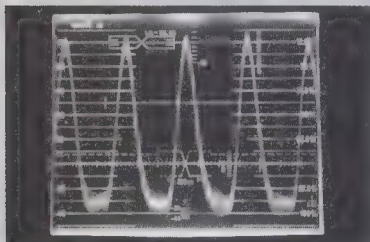
FREQUENCY RESPONSE

20 Hz to 20 kHz 0 dB to -1.06 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (at 0 dB, 1 kHz)

Left/Right 85.0/64.2 dB

Stairstep Linearity



COMPACT DISC SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL 2.0 Volts

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 0 dB)

17 Hz .006%
1 kHz .006%
10 kHz .014%
16 kHz .015%

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (A-weighted) 98.5 dB

DE-EMPHASIS ERROR

1 kHz 0 dB
4 kHz -.09 dB
16 kHz -.04 dB

LINEARITY ERROR

0 dB to -50 dB .14 dB

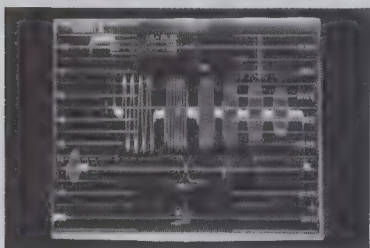
FREQUENCY RESPONSE

17 Hz to 20 kHz 0 dB to -.18 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (at 0 dB, 1 kHz)

Left/Right 83.5/63.9 dB

Frequency Response (video output)



ADDITIONAL DATA

POWER REQUIREMENTS 42 Watts

RANDOM ACCESS TIME 10 Seconds

SCAN TIME 2 Seconds

DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches) 5¹/₂ x 16¹/₂ x 18

WEIGHT 30³/₄ Pounds

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE \$1,900

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

Hitachi S-VHS VCR, Model VT-S730A

The VT-S730A is Hitachi's top-of-the-line VCR. As such, it employs the S-VHS format to achieve one of the best pictures around and comes chock-full of editing features and intriguing playback effects. At \$1,200, it also happens to be a bargain for serious home videographers.

If you fall into that camp, then you'll probably find all the features you'll need here. There's a flying erase head for smooth edits, a jog/shuttle wheel for precise tape handling, synchro and assemble editing, a single-page titler, audio level readouts, a real-time tape counter, VHS indexing and even an output for a video printer. The combination of these features and the ease with which they can be executed are what distinguish this deck from others in its class.

In APEL's performance tests, the VT-S730A delivered what we have come to expect from VCRs of this caliber. Picture detail was excellent, and thanks to the high signal-to-noise ratios exhibited by the VT-S730A, picture resolution could be improved further using a sharpness control. Our only grumble was with the deck's MTS (multichannel television sound) decoder, which did not come up with the highest stereo separation we have measured for a VCR in this stratospheric group. Nevertheless, it did offer adequate stereo imaging for average program fare.

FEATURES

In addition to the usual six heads for video and audio, the VCR has a flying erase head that renders edits free of glitches or rainbow distortion. Pictures also can be erased track by track or frame by frame, rather than simply across the entire tape width. When connected to another Hitachi VCR or camcorder, the VT-S730A will allow for synchro editing. The deck's assemble edit feature can handle eight segments at a time and will allow you to preview the sequence before you commit to the edits.

Looking for those edit points is made easy via two-speed visual search, variable-speed slow-motion, still-frame viewing and frame-by-frame advance. All of this is facilitated

by the machine's jog/shuttle wheel, which appears on the front panel *and* on the supplied remote control. The wheel allows visual searches in either direction at speeds from $\frac{1}{30}$ to 30 times normal play speed in the EP (extended play) mode.

Other attractive features for the home movie buff include a one-page titler with three available fonts, a bar display to indicate the amount of time remaining on a tape, blank search (which will find the point at which recording last stopped), VHS index search and a sampling feature that allows the user to scan all index points.

On the more exotic side, Hitachi provides a rear-panel output for a video printer, which can be controlled from the VCR's remote.

A touch of sound processing has also been included in the form of a bass enhancement switch that boosts audio in the 50 Hz range. An audio mix switch allows you to hear Hi-Fi and conventional audio tracks simultaneously, and sound volume is displayed in dual 12-segment bars.

Further noteworthy features include digital auto tracking, 181-channel cable-ready tuner, eight-event/365-day timer, auto rewind, real-time tape counter and 30-minute memory backup. It also boasts quick tape loading, a front-panel headphone jack with volume control and a parental lock feature.

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

Hitachi S-VHS VCR

Model Number: VT-S730A

Serial Number: NA

VIDEO SECTION

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Video Output
SP (at 4.20 MHz/at 5.0 MHz) **-3.84/-8.12 dB**

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (video output)

Red-Field Chroma
SP (AM/PM) **49.9/45.2 dB**
Luminance
SP (100/50/10 IRE) **45.0/44.4/44.2 dB**

AUDIO SECTION

(SP mode only)

OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional **.35 Volts**
Hi-Fi **3.13 Volts**

THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional **1.90%**
Hi-Fi **.84%**

WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional (avg/peak) **.11/.13%**
Hi-Fi (avg/peak) **.006/.009%**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional **94 Hz to 12.5 kHz**
Hi-Fi **20 Hz to 20 kHz**

that enables you to disable the deck's front panel controls by using the remote (of course this won't prevent your kids from spoon-feeding oatmeal into the cassette slot).

CONTROLS

If the last decade in home video equipment was marked by the addition of features, the '90s are shaping up as the decade when manufacturers try to hide them. Hitachi follows the minimalist design trend by leaving only a few indicator lights and the jog/shuttle wheel exposed on the VT-S730A's front panel. When the hinged panel is lowered, a variety of controls are revealed.

On the vertical surface you'll find the headphone jack, sharpness and color controls, audio mix switch, edit switch, audio

level controls (one for each channel) and bass emphasis button. The lowered panel contains controls for tape transport, channel selection, programming, titles, speed selection, editing features and input selection.

With the main panel closed, a smaller hinged door flips down to reveal a microphone jack, line-level stereo audio input jacks, a synchro edit jack, video input jack and multiple-pin S-video connector. The S-video output is on the rear panel as are the audio and video input and output jacks.

The button-laden remote with LCD display conceals several controls behind its own panel, in addition to duplicating the VCR panel controls (including the jog/shuttle wheel). All this takes two hands to wield comfortably, and allows you to operate other Hitachi VCRs and 10 major brands of TVs.

TEST RESULTS

As good as the video frequency response of this VCR was (down only 3.84 dB at 4.20 MHz), images could be made even crisper using the sharpness control. Generally, boosting such controls means increasing picture noise as well, but because of the VT-S730A's top-notch luminance (brightness) and chroma (color) signal-to-noise (S/N) performance the effect was minimal.

Stairstep linearity (the deck's ability to reproduce shades of gray between black and white) was certainly better than average, with a maximum deviation from perfect linearity never exceeding 7% in APEL's measurements. Color saturation was just about ideal, while color accuracy shifted ever so slightly, as revealed by the lab's vectorscope photo (at left). The shift was so slight that it was hardly noticed under typical viewing conditions. This remained the case even after we made several recordings and played them back through the deck.

The Hi-Fi section of the VCR yielded flat frequency response from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Characteristically, the conventional edge-track audio rolled off at the bass end of the spectrum. It did, however, render above-average treble response out to 12.5 kHz.

The MTS decoder delivered adequate frequency response in stereo out to approximately 12.0 kHz (the limit for MTS is 15 kHz). On the other hand, separation was not as high as we would have hoped—ranging from a low of less than 18 dB to a high of just over 24 dB. Frequency response in the SAP (second audio program) mode was solid, and signal-to-noise ratios here were excellent. The decoder also delivered good S/N numbers in mono, but frequency response rolled off rapidly above 4.0 kHz.

Hitachi's VT-S730A is a deck for the serious video enthusiast. By employing the S-VHS format for a better picture and loading the VCR with sophisticated editing features, Hitachi has created a deck for those who want to get the most out of their home video productions.

—Len Feldman

HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)	
Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	.59/.38%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	.14/.10/.59%

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	
Conventional	51.1 dB
Hi-Fi	91.6 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)	
Hi-Fi	62.0/66.6 dB

MTS DECODER SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (at 100% modulation)	
Stereo (left/right)	62.6/62.5 dB
SAP	83.2 dB
Mono	65.5 dB

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.34/.32%
SAP	0.81%
Mono	0.28%

Color Accuracy



FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)	
Stereo	26 Hz to 12.0 kHz
SAP	20 Hz to 6.0 kHz
Mono	25 Hz to 4.0 kHz

ADDITIONAL DATA

POWER REQUIREMENTS	33.0 Watts
FAST-FORWARD TIME (T-120 tape)	4 Min., 8 Sec.
FAST-REWIND TIME (T-120 tape)	4 Min., 12 Sec.
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	4x17 1/8x15 1/8
WEIGHT	16 1/2 Pounds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$1,200

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

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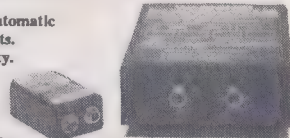
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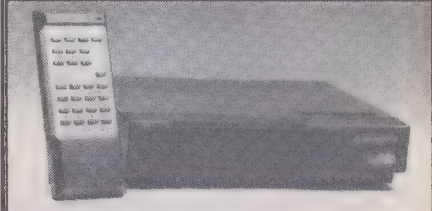
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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY RCA Monitor/Receiver, Model F27160WN

Not every home theater needs to be of epic dimensions or expense. RCA's 27-inch F27160WN is modestly priced and provides a more modest-sized home-theater picture. Monitor/receivers of this size have become mainstays among viewers who want a big screen but just can't spring for monitors in the 30-inch-plus range.

At \$729, this RCA color set offers a surprising number of features. In order to make the operation of its audio and video controls easier, the manufacturer has incorporated an on-screen menu system, which can be operated via the supplied remote control. Things can still get complicated, however, so RCA has seen fit to include an auto-demonstration mode to take you through the paces. In addition, users who have both cable and antenna hookups will appreciate the F27160WN's ability to automatically switch from one input to the other.

In APEL's performance tests, this RCA monitor delivered picture detail (520 lines of horizontal resolution) that was more than adequate to take advantage of all the high-resolution formats currently available: ED Beta, S-VHS, Hi8 or laser discs. In terms of color accuracy, however, the lab discovered that the monitor was quite sensitive to magnetic interference. The set's auto-degaussing corrects most of this problem, but a perceptive viewer will detect some nonuniformity in white and red areas. This turned out to be a minor complaint when compared with measured MTS (multichannel television sound) decoder performance, which came in well below average (see Test Results below).

FEATURES

With the menu system and the supplied remote control, you can control the F27160WN without rising from your chair. By flipping through the menus with the remote, picture parameters—including sharpness, brightness and color—can be adjusted and stored. Special functions such as the four-hour sleep timer, clock and the audio setup can also be adjusted from your chair.

If, after playing with all the setup functions, you decide that the folks at RCA had it right to begin with, you can simply push a button to restore the factory presets (a welcome convenience for households with younger viewers who like to play with the color controls). The monitor also has an automatic color control system that will ad-

just for any color variance between TV channels. A light sensor automatically corrects contrast and color settings depending on the room light conditions.

The F27160WN also includes a 147-channel tuner, expanded stereo (to increase apparent stereo separation), a comb filter (to help eliminate video noise), automatic station tuning and a nifty convenience called automatic cable/air switching. This last feature will automatically switch between cable or antenna inputs depending on the station selected.

CONTROLS

With the on-screen menu system there's little need to bother with a welter of front-panel controls. So RCA provides the



LAB MEASUREMENTS: RCA Monitor/Receiver Model Number: F27160WN Serial Number: 938327120

VIDEO SECTION

MAXIMUM USABLE LUMINANCE	85 Footlamberts
RESOLUTION (horizontal/vertical)	520/500 Lines
CONVERGENCE (center/corners)	0/.23%
VIDEO FREQUENCY RESPONSE	6.5 MHz
INTERLACE	60/40
TRANSIENT RESPONSE	Very Good
BLACK LEVEL RETENTION	100%
COLOR QUALITY	Very Good
OVERSCAN	Very Good

AMPLIFIER SECTION

MAXIMUM OUTPUT Audio Output	6.6 Volts
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (1 kHz, at -10 dB) Audio Output	.008%
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (A-weighted) Audio Output	90.7 dB
FREQUENCY RESPONSE Audio Output	20 Hz to 20 kHz

necessities below the screen, including power, volume and channel controls. A video button is also provided for making picture adjustments, as is a setup control for setting the sleep timer, auto programming and demonstration of the menu system.

The remote control duplicates all of the set's controls, plus others. Not only can you access channels directly via remote, but if you have a compatible RCA VCR, the remote control will handle that as well.

On the rear panel of the F27160WN are two sets of video and stereo audio input jacks, as well as stereo output jacks (to hook up an external stereo system), conventional audio and video outputs and an S-connector for similarly equipped camcorders, VCRs and laser disc players.

TEST RESULTS

Brightness levels on the F27160WN were solid, with maximum usable luminance coming in at 85 footlamberts. Picture resolution topped 500 lines, more than holding its own in terms of rendering detailed images.

AUDIO SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(at 1,000 uV, A-weighted)	
Stereo (left/right)	57.3/57.0 dB
SAP	68.5 dB
Mono	65.2 dB

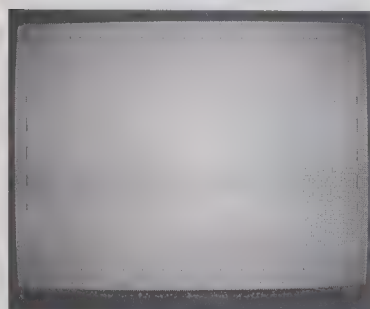
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.26/.10%
SAP	.42%
Mono	.36%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(at -20 dB, 100% modulation)	
Stereo	see Test Results text
SAP	20 Hz to 3 kHz
Mono	28 Hz to 4 kHz

Overscan



CHANNEL SEPARATION

(at 1 kHz, 100%/-20 dB, 100% modulation)	
Left Channel	18.5/10.0 dB
Right Channel	17.5/9.2 dB

ADDITIONAL DATA

PICTURE SIZE	27 inches (diag.)
POWER REQUIREMENTS	80 Watts
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	22 7/8 x 27 x 19 1/2
WEIGHT	NA
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$729

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

Video frequency response was correspondingly good, measuring 6.5 MHz. Color accuracy was also good, and the set's perfect black level retention meant that black-and-white and color images were vivid.

The one picture flaw detected in APEL's tests was a small amount of overscan. However, we felt this was a minor difficulty and not serious enough to be considered a design error. In the remaining lab tests—transient response, interlace and convergence—the measurements were short of ideal but still better than average, especially for a monitor/receiver in this price range. As is true with other RCA TV sets we have tested, the TV tuner was beyond reproach.

Though this set exhibited respectable picture performance, the MTS decoder section had its shortcomings. The audio amplifier delivered flat frequency response, low distortion and superb signal-to-noise ratios. However, the stereo decoder could do no better than 18.5 dB of channel separation (1 kHz at 100% modulation). Separation decreased even further to 10 dB or less at lower levels of modulation, and above 3 kHz there was virtually no channel separation. Compounding sound problems was the decoder section's overall frequency response, which began to roll off past the 2 kHz mark and dipped to -12 dB by 10 kHz. We found these measurements translated into a dull stereo quality—when stereo was discernible. (All lab measurements were made with the stereo expander off.)

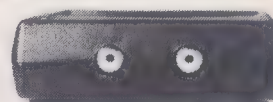
After testing a second sample and getting approximately the same measurements, APEL contacted RCA engineers. They explained that the frequency response rolloff was an intentional characteristic of the decoder used in this set (RCA uses dbx in their more expensive models). According to the company, in focus groups it conducted, viewers of this set preferred the limited-bandwidth sound of the RCA decoder. Nevertheless, we believe manufacturers should stick to the MTS standard to provide true stereo TV sound. To get good broadcast stereo while viewing this monitor, you'll have to use the MTS tuner on your VCR.

SAP (second audio program) performance fell short of what we would have liked. Frequency response here extended out to only 3 kHz (admittedly, not as much of a concern with a bandwidth primarily intended for spoken word transmission).

For those whose main concern is with good picture resolution and solid color reproduction, the RCA F27160WN should do nicely. But if you're looking for stereo reception to match, this set leaves much to be desired. Naturally, if you plan to use a VCR or laser disc player as your main stereo source, our criticisms of the MTS decoding circuitry don't apply since that circuitry is not involved in reproducing such stereo audio.

—Len Feldman

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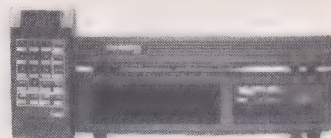
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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY Sharp VHS Camcorder, Model VL-L280U

Shooting videotape generally requires a lot of illumination to capture a good picture, so any increase of a camcorder's ability to shoot in low light is laudable. The VL-L280U full-size VHS camcorder from Sharp, however, was able to shoot in such low light conditions that it should be adopted as the official camcorder for spelunkers.

Not only did the VL-L280U receive a 1.9 low lux rating in APEL's tests, but it also delivered excellent color purity, nearly perfect white balance, a minimum of color contamination and better-than-average video signal-to-noise ratios. Sharp has combined this excellent picture quality performance with a 12:1 zoom, the highest zoom ratio currently available in home equipment (now the race is on for an 18:1 zoom).

The only possible shortfalls we found on this camcorder were its weight, average audio performance and no-foolin'-around price, \$2,200. At a hefty 8 pounds (with cassette and battery), the VL-L280U would probably not ultimately win a spelunker's favor, but if you have the shoulder for it, you'll find this camcorder is worth its weight in features.



FEATURES

In order to attain its low minimum illumination rating, the VL-L280U incorporates a high-gain control that allows extremely low light shooting but which may cause a slight increase in picture noise. The camcorder uses a 1/2-inch CCD (charge coupled device) chip rated by the manufacturer at 270,000 pixels, along with an f1.6 lens, 12:1 variable speed zoom and macro focus. The high-speed shutter has three settings: 1/2000, 1/1000 and 1/500 of a second. Focus, iris adjustment and white balance can be set for automatic operation (though the last can be set with a lock switch if you want to prevent it from constantly adjusting under varying light conditions).

A flying erase head is provided for seamless edits, and the camcorder allows for audio dubbing. The VL-L280U also has a self timer, interval recording (every 30 seconds), index marking, insert editing and backlight compensation. There's even a digital superimposer for storing titles and cue review for checking the last couple of

seconds of a scene you have just shot. In addition, the camcorder has fade-in and -out and a tape counter rewind memory. It accepts power from a battery pack, AC outlet or a car battery (which requires an optional cord).

CONTROLS

The majority of the VL-L280U's camera related controls are along the left side of the camcorder. They include a rotary knob for manual focusing and switches for auto/manual focus, fade-in/fade-out, backlight compensation/gain-up, cue review, counter reset, shutter speed, date/time display and white balance. Also found here are the selectors for the superimposer, a headphone jack, an audio/video input and output connector and a jack for hooking up a remote start/stop switch.

Controls associated with the camcorder's VCR section's record and playback functions are found along the top of the camcorder, concealed behind a hinged panel. Audio dubbing and insert editing buttons are

LAB MEASUREMENTS: Sharp VHS Camcorder Model Number: VL-L280U Serial Number: 908311516

CAMERA SECTION

MINIMUM ILLUMINATION	1.9 Lux
HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION	350 Lines
COLOR CONTAMINATION	6 IRE
WHITE BALANCE	4 IRE
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (optimum/minimum illumination)	
Red Field Chroma, AM	49.9/38.5 dB
Luminance	41.4/32.9 dB
MINIMUM FOCAL DISTANCE	42 inches (1/16 inch, macro)
LENS APERTURE	f1.6
ZOOM RATIO	12:1
FOCAL LENGTH	8mm to 96mm

AUDIO SECTION

MAXIMUM MIKE OUTPUT	.33 Volts
EXTERNAL MIKE SENSITIVITY	5.0 mv
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	47.5 dB

COMBINED PERFORMANCE

HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION (video/TV output)	260/250 Lines
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (optimum/minimum illumination)	
Red-Field Chroma, AM (video out)	47.5/39.8 dB
Luminance (video out)	43.4/35.5 dB
Red-Field Chroma, AM (TV out)	46.4/39.6 dB
Luminance (TV out)	41.5/35.5 dB

also found beneath this top panel.

With the panel closed, the main power switch and cassette eject button remain exposed. The zoom rocker switch and the start/stop switch are conveniently situated near the handgrip so that your fingers naturally rest against the controls when cradling the camcorder on the right shoulder. Up front, atop the lens housing, are the self-timer switch and the macro control button.

TEST RESULTS

At the risk of harping on one feature, we should note that (with the gain up switch engaged) the minimum required illumination measured for this Sharp camcorder was 1.9 lux—actually a bit better than the 2.0 lux claimed by the manufacturer. And even without the gain up feature, minimum illumination came in at 3.7 lux—still considered good for low-light shooting. White balance, or the amount of chrominance (color) visible on a neutral object, was a mere 4 IRE, and color contamination—the appearance of color interference on a detailed black-and-white test pattern—was measured at only 6 IRE. When our reference tape was recorded and played back through the VL-L280U, color purity, color accuracy and the amount of color saturation were all judged to be excellent (Fig. 1).

Measured horizontal resolution—while it may look low when compared to the Hi8 and S-VHS formats—was about as high as one is likely to find in a standard VHS camcorder: 350 lines measured directly from the camera output. Using the direct video output, the measurement dropped to 260 lines following a complete record-play cycle. As is characteristic with camcorders, further deterioration of horizontal resolution oc-

curred when measurements were made via the TV output.

Video signal-to-noise ratios, as measured by APEL's engineers, were outstanding, especially under conditions of optimum illumination. Using the direct video output

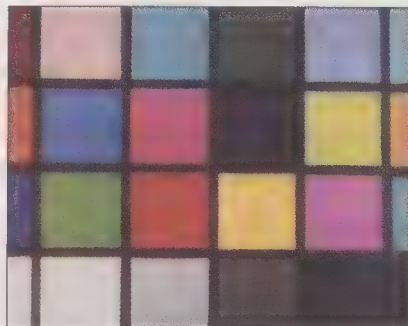


Fig. 1. Color purity: excellent.

terminal, chroma (color) signal-to-noise ratios reached as high as 47.5 dB, while luminance (brightness) measurements climbed to 43.4 dB. This means that you can expect a very clear picture from this camcorder when shooting in good light conditions.

In terms of audio performance, the VL-L280U was average. APEL noted that measured input sensitivity for an external microphone was a rather high 5.0 millivolts. The built-in microphone's sensitivity was low, so keep these two measurements in mind if you buy this camcorder and intend to use an external mike with it. Only an external mike with high levels of output should be used.

While putting the camcorder through its paces, we became particularly enamored of its 12:1 zoom feature, allowing us to home in on objects usually out of our range with a 6:1 or 8:1 zoom lens. All the camcorder's other features worked well, and we found the owner's manual's step-by-step approach lucid and simple. Even the novice should find this camcorder easy to operate after reading the 40-plus-page guide. Moreover, the serious video enthusiast will appreciate the flexibility afforded by the manual overrides and the editing modes.—Len Feldman

ABOUT THESE TEST REPORTS

Each piece of video equipment we test is a factory-fresh production model—the same quality you would buy in a store. After each product has been tested by APEL—Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory, a leading independent testing facility headed by engineer Frank Barr—it goes to technical editor Len Feldman, an internationally recognized authority with more than 30 years' experience testing home entertainment products. He interprets the data and performs hands-on use tests of each piece of equipment, combining personal, practical experience with the most objective technical data available anywhere.

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Phase Accuracy



ADDITIONAL DATA

WEIGHT (including battery and tape)	8$\frac{3}{4}$ Pounds
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	9$\frac{3}{8}$ x 6$\frac{7}{8}$ x 17$\frac{1}{2}$
POWER ZOOM SPEED	6 Seconds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$2,200

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

...PRIVATE STOCK

Continued from page 60

probably two or three would have been more than enough."

But despite Thompson's efforts to save TV, he doesn't think he's preserving it. He points out, logically, that if he has taped a show off the air, someone else had a copy to air in the first place. In addition, much of his collection has been recorded at the extended-play (EP) speed—suitable for teaching and research, but not for reproduction or broadcasting. And he doesn't regard his use of the VHS format, nor his storage facilities, as contributing to archival-quality tapes.

In Thompson's mind, it's people who salvage and save filmed episodes and kinescopes of old shows—like Ira Gallen—who have really preserved television history. "There's stuff that those collectors collect that simply does not exist elsewhere," he says. "And they, I think, have really kept some of this culture alive that would have disappeared otherwise."

Thompson is encouraging to people who want to set up their own video collections. "For someone who really wants to set out right now and get a good, solid, video television library going," he says, "it's the first two years that are the most difficult, because you're recording just about everything. You've got to get your five representative examples of *My Three Sons* and your five examples of *The Tonight Show* and all that kind of stuff. That's when you really go through all the tapes. Once you've made that first foray through the earlier shows, then it's maintenance."

Armed with a decent cable package, Thompson says, you can catch *The Donna Reed Show*, *Car 54, Where Are You?* and *Saturday Night Live* on the Nick at Nite cable service, for example. Then, you can switch over to the Nostalgia Network and watch old commercials from the '50s.

If anything, it's easier now than it used to be to assemble a television history, Thompson says. With the growth of cable in the 1980s, the need to fill up time has created a demand for increasingly obscure old shows. Though a TV industry rule of thumb is that a show needs a minimum of 65 episodes before it can go into reruns, cable channels are running programs that never lasted that long.

There are museums of broadcasting outside of major cities, Thompson admits. "They're right in the living room in the cable box—in the television set." □

Reader Poll

What's your video collection like? *Video Review* wants to know. Through our new phone line, we're conducting a reader poll on videocassette collecting. If you'd like to participate, call *Video Review's* Fast Forward phone line. See page 23 for details.

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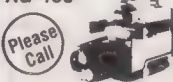
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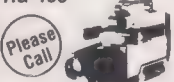
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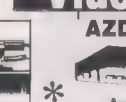


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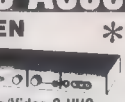


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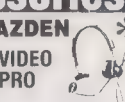
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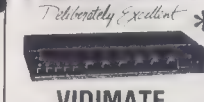


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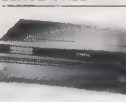
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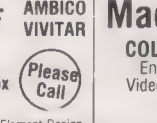
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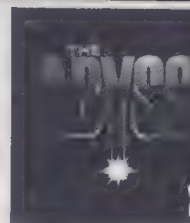
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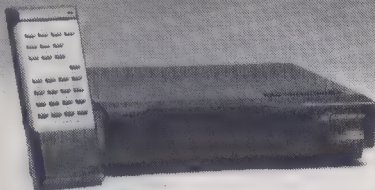
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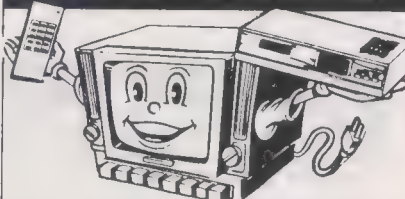
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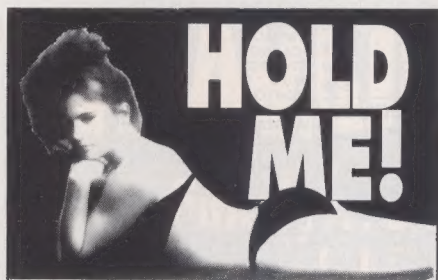
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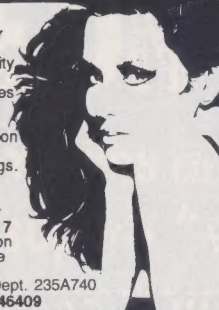
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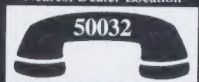


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